THE SHEPHERD-PRINCE

אהבת ציון

ABRAHAM MAPU

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The Shepherd-Prince

אהבת ציון

A Historical Romance of the Days of Isaiah

By
ABRAHAM MAPU

Translated from the Hebrew by
BENJAMIN A. M. SCHAPIRO
Author of
Word Studies in the Old Testament

Introduction by
ROBERT DICK WILSON, Ph.D., D.D., LL.D.

Religious Novel
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DEDICATED
TO
MY ESTEEMED FRIEND,
ROBERT DUN DOUGLASS, Esq.,

WHOSE MANY YEARS' LOYALTY AND DEVOTION TO AND APPRECIATION OF WHAT IS NOBLE AND GOOD IN MY PEOPLE, HAS BEEN AN AID AND INSPIRATION TO ME IN MY WORK OF PROMULGATING THE MESSAGE OF RECONCILIATION BETWEEN JEW AND CHRISTIAN,
BY THE TRANSLATOR

12847

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"THE SHEPHERD-PRINCE"

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

Ben-Amos.....The Prophet Isaiah

Hezekiah.....King of Judah

King Ahaz.....Father of Hezekiah

Sennacherib.....King of Assyria

Nobleman Joram-ben-Abiezer.....A Man-at-Arms

Hagith and Naomi.....His Wives

Adoram.....A Gentile Merchant

Prince Jedidjah.....Treasurer to King Ahaz

Thirza.....His Wife

Mattan.....The Unrighteous Judge

Jozabad, The Tyrant.....His Father

Abisai and Sithri.....Kinsmen of Naomi

Hananel.....Father of Thirza

Amnon and Penina.....Children of Joram and Naomi

Theman and Thamar.....Children of Jedidjah and Thirza

Micah of Morashti.....The Prophet Micah

Azrikam.....Supposed to be the son of Joram and Hagith

Achan.....Joram's Steward

Helah.....A Canaanitish woman, his wife

Ira.....Hagith's Father

Chepher and Bukjah.....Drunkards of Ephraim; Henchmen of Mattan

Zimri.....A Priest of Baal

Uz.....A Shepherd Friend of Amnon
Maacah and Puah.....Thamar's Maids
Sebna.....King Hezekiah's Chamberlain
Rabshaka.....An Assyrian General
Karmi.....A Wine Shop Keeper
Pura.....Amnon's Servant
Nabal.....Son of Achan and Helah

Judges, Sons of the Prophets, Soldiers, Shepherds,
Watchmen on the Walls of Zion, Pilgrims,
Captives and Slaves

Place.....Jerusalem
Time.....726 B. C.

INTRODUCTION

ROBERT DICK WILSON, PH.D., D.D., LL.D.
Professor of Semitic Languages at Princeton Theological Seminary

THE perusal of "The Shepherd-Prince," translated from the work of the famous Jewish writer of fiction, Abraham Mapu, by Mr. B. A. M. Schapiro, will show how possible it is for the spirit and "atmosphere" of a people, as well as the environment and setting of ages long past, to be brought out so vividly as to make them real to the consciousness of readers of today. To achieve this is a distinction, the height of literary art.

This work is to be warmly commended to Christian readers because it presents in graphic form the ideas of a modern Israelite with regard to the life and ideals, the emotions and aspirations, of the Ancient Chosen People.

The period of this intensely interesting love story is that of the time of Isaiah, the greatest in the long list of prophets from Moses to Christ. And the incidents of the love-idyl and love-tragedy throughout its course, which, as in all human experience, did not run smooth, but was ultimately triumphant, are admirably developed and in language so felicitous that one feels almost as if it were from the Bible-fount itself.

Love—the greatest thing in the world—found expression in ancient times just as it does today; although the setting differed, the essentials are the same, and the reader of modern fictional literature will find something refreshing in the pure and ardent affection of the hero

and heroine, in their tribulations and joys. We believe that this book will be uplifting and that it will have a healthful influence on readers of the present time; for, as has been well said, "There is no time in life when books do not influence a man," and the potency and sway of a good book are incalculable.

The love story—the leading motive of the book—illustrates the theme of the Song of Songs: that love is stronger than death. It is interesting to observe that love at first sight was, in the estimation of Mapu, as common a thing as it is in our own times, and that the course of love ran no more smoothly then than now. The manner in which the passion was manifested, especially of the heroine, may shock the sensibilities of some of the readers, because of the departure from certain conventionalities to which they are accustomed; but it is well to learn how other people express their affection and how a great Hebrew scholar imagines the passion and the practice of love among the Israelites 2,700 years ago.

Mr. Schapiro has put the reading public unfamiliar with Hebrew language and literature under a deep debt of gratitude for the excellent manner in which he has rendered into English this masterpiece of Abraham Mapu, whose fame is known to the uttermost ends of the earth as the "Father of Jewish Fiction."

The translator is an acknowledged master of Hebrew, the Rabbinical exegesis of the Old Testament, and the Talmudical interpretation of the same. He has written much and well, being the author of many useful and learned pamphlets. He is therefore eminently well qualified to translate for readers of English the wonderfully poetic and figurative language of the original, which abounds in prose-poetry and song of the highest character. Indeed, the translation is so free from the usual

ear-marks of translated works that, if there were not two names on the title-page, it might well be taken for an original work in English.

We have compared the translation here and there with the original of Mapu and find that it is a fair and sympathetic rendering. Sometimes, especially in the poetic passages, the translator varies slightly the figures of the Hebrew; but in such cases, the beauty so far from being impaired, seems often to be improved. This is high praise for a translation, but it is amply justified by such a gem as the last verse of the first song of Amnon in praise of country life, which reads:

"Crowns, wrought of gold and many a precious stone,
The brows of kings adorn, of princes press:
Wild roses are the shepherd's crown alone,
With which he decks the chosen Shepherdess."

נֵזֶר תִּפְאֶרֶת עִם אֲבָנִים יְקָרוֹת
תִּהְיֶינָה לְרֹאשֵׁי הַנְּגִידִים וְהַנְּבִיחָה,
שׁוֹשַׁנֵּי עֲמָקִים לִרְוֹעֵת עֲטָרוֹת,
יָשִׂים עַל רֹאשׁ רֹעֲיָתוֹ הַבְּחִירָה.

And by a particularly felicitous rendering of a poem that sounds like a Psalm of David, as follows:

Oh, Zion, praise the Lord of Hosts
Whose throne is set on high,
Who spreads the day-spring round thy feet,
And lights o'erhead the sky,
To cheer thee mid thy darkest woes,
While gloom envelops all thy foes,
Thy God, who rules and never sleeps,
Awaits to bless each one who weeps.

He drops the dew upon the grass
Throughout the silent night,
And tints the mountain-tops with joy
At the primal gleam of light,
While songs of love the valleys greet
As worshipers at Shiloh meet
To praise him for the favor shown
To all who worship at His throne.

Sing, sing, oh, sing unto the Lord,
Ye mountain-tops and stars;
Sing, sing, oh, sing, brave Zion's sons,
For victory crowns your scars;
Sing, sing, ye daughters of our race,
Glad songs of praise with ancient grace,
For all the cruel foemen fly
Before our King who rules on high.

שָׂחֲקִים עַל רֹאשֵׁךְ יְלוּ עַל אוֹרֶשֶׁת.
סְעָפִים נִשְׂקְפוּ אֲמִרוֹת מְרוֹרוֹת.
אִמְרוֹת אֱלוֹהַּ רַבּוּ אֶל נְבִיעָתָם
יְרֵאִי אֵיתָם צִיּוּךְ פְּרֹאשׁ צוּרִים.
יְרֵאוּהוּ וְיִכָּרְתוּ בְּאוֹרִים.
וְיִתְרֹעֲעוּ בָּיוּשׁ לָךְ בְּנֵךְ.

תַּרְנִינִי שׁוֹבְנֵי בוֹקֶר וְעֶרֶב.
חֲדֵי תְרִישׁ לְאֻמִּים שְׁרִידֵי תֵרֵב:
אִמְרִי לְבַת צִיּוֹן: הִנֵּה זֶה אֱלֹהֵיךְ.
חִכָּה גּוֹיִם עֲרִיצִים חֲמַצֵּי עֲרֻבוֹת.
וַיַּשְׁפֵּז כְּדֵב בְּנִים עַל אִבּוֹת.
וְתֵתֵן בְּצַע פְּאֵר־וְכִלַּת עֲדֵי כִלְּדֵךְ.

הַלְלִי אֱלֹהַיִךְ צִיּוֹן חֲדָשִׁים לְבָקָרִים.
הִנֵּה שִׁחֲרֵךְ פָּרוּשׁ עַל הֶהָרִים.
וְחִשֵּׁךְ תַּעֲרֹל כִּסֵּה שְׁמָצֵךְ.
פִּתְחִי שְׁעָרַיִךְ לְהַסּוֹנִים חַפּוֹנִים.
וְיָבֹא לָךְ גּוֹי צַדִּיק שׁוֹמֵר אֱמוּנִים.
הַמְחֻדָּדִים מִיָּם לְחֹג חַגֵּךְ.

Within the limits of a Foreword it is impossible adequately to do justice to the scholarship and intrinsic worth of such a work as this; but, without flattery, it can safely be asserted that Mr. Schapiro has presented in a singularly fascinating way in its English dress, the greatest novel that has ever been produced in the Hebrew language. To say more would be like painting the lily or refining pure gold.

TRANSLATOR'S FOREWORD

The Why and How of the Issuance of

The Shepherd-Prince

THE position of a translator—especially of an original work that has achieved distinction and popularity in its own idiom—is somewhat anomalous; for, however accurate and redolent of the spirit of the work translated he may have made it, the blame for anything that does not suit or please the reader's taste has to be borne by him who provides the vehicle through which those of other tongues may apprehend the original setting. It is always, therefore, a source of satisfaction to a translator to be assured by men competent to judge that he has succeeded in carrying out the aims and ideals which possessed him when undertaking the rendering of a work from one language into another.

The aims I set before me in this translation—a labor extending over years and representing many revisions and considerable research, constant and profound, into Hebrew and Rabbinical literature and tradition—were to present in an English garb, so that it could be apprehended and enjoyed by English-speaking peoples, this masterpiece and unique work by the Founder of Jewish Fiction—Abraham Mapu. As a corollary to this, I felt that if my effort succeeded, the reading public would have a much clearer and better insight into Jewish history, habits, and customs in the days before the First Captivity. A further thought

was in my mind that it would be a means of removing much of that misappreciation and prejudice which Jews have had to suffer at the hands of Christians, by removing misunderstandings and falsities and by presenting in story form the thoughts, emotions, ideals, and characteristics of the Hebrew race, all through its varied and eventful history.

I saw a vision, felt a message that I must convey, and was moved to do so in my own way, because thereby I could carry out my ambition to produce a book which, not alone in its text but in the beauty of its illustrations, its typography and its general physical "get-up," should set a high-water mark and become the most ornate and superb volume of Hebrew historic fiction ever issued from the press.

I therefore refused the adventitious advantages offered by historic publishing houses, and decided, although it was a supremely difficult task, involving many self-denials on my part, to issue the book myself under my own supervision and imprimatur, aided by the kindly and spontaneous co-operation of friends who heartened and encouraged me in this laudable and novel adventure in publication.

To them and to those over thirty eminent divines especially, who after reading in proof-form the text gave me their opinions in such generous a manner as will be seen in the "Appreciations" that appeared in separate brochures, I wish to extend my heartfelt gratitude. It would ill become me to say how far I have succeeded in carrying out my original aims; rather will I let others express their judgment.

I might have done better had I had a life-long acquaintance with the beautiful English language—the tongue of Shakespeare and of Lincoln—but my excuse

must be that only in my early manhood did I come under the aegis of the American Flag. And here I give the reader a bit of personal history—a "human document," so to speak—by telling him that when I landed on these hospitable shores—the land of liberty and ideals, the lodestar of human hopes and aspirations—I knew not a word of that sonorous and expressive language which in richness of diction and capabilities of thought-expression is a great and priceless heritage because it has received affluents from the rivers of speech of ancient and modern times, Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Oriental, and sporadic vocabularies, source-founts of human utterance.

I may, however, without false modesty, express the hope that in "THE SHEPHERD-PRINCE" there is a story for the reader which will give him healthy views of life as it is portrayed by the heart-feelings and experiences of the characters that move upon the stage of action, and likewise give a clearer and more attractive view of life during a period of great historical interest that foreshadowed the dawn of a new era in the world's progress.

In a word, I trust the book will have a good and a lasting influence, not merely a pleasurable and transient one, but that it may be the means of promoting a more charitable and clearer understanding and sympathy between Jew and Gentile, sons of the one true God, Who was the God of Israel in the days covered by this story as He is today both of Jew and Gentile, bond and free, all being His sons and His beloved.

If the reading of the "Shepherd-Prince" will show the Gentile reader that the Jewish people, like other great and ancient races, must not be judged by those who may have disgraced them but by those who represent in their daily life avocation and conduct, a people of

high ideals and feelings; then I shall have fulfilled one of my most cherished ambitions. If, too, the book shall lead my own people to a greater and more constant study of the Law and the Prophets—the Old Testament, which is today too often neglected by them—and to prize more highly God's gift to His Chosen People in making them in olden times the custodian of His revelation to many through the inspired writers of that wondrous Book, I shall indeed feel that my labor has not been in vain.

This book deals with the times known as the "Golden Period" in Jewish history; for it was the age of the divine-intoxicated seers, Isaiah and of Nahum and Micah. The period was one of intense struggle between Paganism and the true worship of Jehovah, each contending for supremacy—the one represented by Sennacherib and the enemies of Israel, and the other by Hezekiah and Isaiah.

The good characters in Mapu's masterpiece present pictures—spiritual, chaste, and inspiring. The love between hero and heroine is of purest and most ennobling type, free from passion and material gloss.

What a horror had Mapu of hypocrisy, vulgarity, and lowness of thought; and to think that this book was written by a Russian Jew within the pale. No wonder why the Lord used our race as His Chosen People for the bearing of a message of blessing for all humanity.

Homer and Virgil wrote for Greeks and Romans, but David sang for all nations and all times.

It is worthy of notice that Mapu was one of the people who were forbidden to till the soil by the Czarist's government and yet could write so feelingly and eloquently of the beauty of pastoral life, as witness the dissertation in Chapter VII.

Then, too, he shows that charity in the days of

which he writes was a real, personal, and whole-hearted thing, not a mere side issue to be taken up when convenient and laid by until another incitement arises.

Mapu presents life in a natural, intensely human, and altruistically sympathetic manner which appeals to all humanity. This work has been translated, indeed, into most civilized tongues, the latest being the Arabic!

Mapu, after neglect and abuse, is recognized today as one of the super-intellectuals who has made history vital and touched the life of the present generation by a mirrored analysis and portraiture of human life and action twenty-eight centuries ago.

The work now translated into English appeared nearly seventy years since and yet the characters live as real as if it had been issued today, and the interesting fact is that this book aroused an intense love for Zion and really pioneered what is now known as Zionism.

In giving this work in English to the public I wish to add a tribute to the memory of a good and loyal friend, the Rev. M. E. Dwight, D.D., who has passed on but not gone away, for his influence has been a great contributory factor in all those things which are, after all, the only ones worth while in life, or, to put it in the words of the great Hebrew-Christian apostle: "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

From Dr. Dwight I received much help and encouragement, especially in the collating of the poetic renderings in "The Shepherd-Prince."

Much thanks is also due to my beloved friend and brother, the Rev. Kenneth Mackenzie, the Rev.

H. E. Woolever, D.D., and George H. Sandison, Ph.D., who kindly read in proof form the pages of "The Shepherd-Prince" before publication.

And so, whatever its imperfections and blemishes may be, I put forth this effort, the fruit of many years' toil, sometimes of tears and tribulations, leaving it to you, Gentle Reader, to give it a friendly and courteous welcome, if it appeal, as I hope and believe it will, to your heart and head.

B. A. M. Schapiro

Bible House, New York.

THE SHEPHERD-PRINCE

CHAPTER I

The Covenant

IN the reign of King Ahaz, there lived at Jerusalem a man named Joram-ben-Abiezer. He was a nobleman of Judah, and captain over a thousand armed men. He owned many fields and vineyards on Mt. Carmel and at Sharon, and had herds of sheep and cattle in Bethlehem Judea. He also possessed many elegant palaces, adorned with ivory carvings, and was rich in gold and silver.

Joram had two wives, Hagith and Naomi. Naomi was beautiful in person, gracious in word and in deeds. On this account Joram loved her dearly, but she was childless.

When Hagith saw that her companion had found favor in Joram's eyes she became envious and sought to vex Naomi.

"What," said she, "shall that dry twig on Joram's stem exalt itself above the fruitful one?" Then she gazed proudly at her two children.

Perceiving Hagith's behavior, Joram built a separate house for Naomi, that she might escape the envy and derision of her rival.

He had appointed his servant, Achan, steward over his entire household. He had also given him Helah, a Canaanitish woman, Hagith's maid-servant, for his wife.

Joram possessed a faithful friend, who loved him as a brother. He had descended from the kings of Judah—and was King Ahaz's treasurer. He was rich and attractive, highly esteemed by all who knew him. He inclined his ear to the words of the prophets, and because he loved their teachings, gave freely to their support, and used his influence for their protection. He was called Jedidjah, "the Benefactor."

Joram and Jedidjah shone like two precious stones in a crown, during the reign of Ahaz—that perverse generation. Their hearts remained faithful to God, and his saints, and they associated with the prophets, who adhered to the teachings of Isaiah, the son of Amos.

At the same time, Judge Mattan, the son of Jozabad, "the Tyrant," lived at Jerusalem. He was a man of violence, yet he associated with Joram, and became his most intimate friend and counsellor. Mattan publicly manifested great affection for Joram, but in his heart he had hated him ever since Hagith had become the latter's wife. Joram was unsuspicious and never dreamt of Mattan's deceitfulness, but considered him a sincere friend.

Mattan's enmity arose from the following occurrence: Jozabad had been a crafty villain, striving to rob his fellow-inhabitants of their property. He had amassed his riches through injustice and violence. In vain did the injured complain; he would restore nothing on which he had once laid his hands; with him, not justice, but brute force decided the matter. There were many who supported him, on account of his great

wealth, or through fear, and thus he ever succeeded in triumphing over his opponents, when their case came before the judges at the gate. Among many others who were thus at strife with Jozabad was Ira, Hagith's father, on account of Jozabad having changed the boundaries of his fruitful field, adjoining the latter's land, in the darkness of night. This strife lasted many years, and the two men bitterly hated each other.

Jozabad was already a decrepit old man, when Mattan, the robber's son, fell violently in love with Hagith, and his love for Ira's daughter exceeded the father's hatred. He sought her, and said:

"Oh! that the days of mourning for my father might come speedily. I would then restore to thy father the disputed tract of land, together with the surrounding acres, as a compensation for the long-existing strife. This I would do, because I love thee, Hagith, above all others. Therefore, bestow upon me the affection of thy youth, and become my wife. See, I am my father's only heir, and, with my riches, thou shalt lack for naught."

Hagith had, however, given her heart to nobleman Joram, yet she did not leave Mattan without hope. Ira, her father, had advised this course, although he had promised his daughter to Joram.

Jozabad, greatly to the delight of his son Mattan and the people whom he had robbed, died in the course of time. Those whom he had defrauded appealed to Mattan to restore to them the possessions which his father had taken from

them, but his heart was like the heart of his father.

After the applicants had departed, Mattan went to Ira, and said:

"Behold! my father, who was thine opponent is dead, therefore take back thy field. I will also give thee the surrounding acres, to recompense thee for the many years during which my father reaped the products of the ground, besides you may charge me with the taxes, and I will increase the dowry and the gifts; only give me thy daughter, Hagith, as my wife, for I love her."

Then Ira answered him:

"Thy father robbed the poor, and trod the needy under foot, therefore a curse will rest upon thee. Moreover, how can I give my daughter to one whom so many reproach? However, if thou dost wish to form an alliance with me, hearken to my words, and I will be thy father. Go forth, call together those whom thy father robbed, make restitution for that which he took away; then the complaints of the people against thee will cease."

"Truly, thou desirest a high price for thy daughter, but I will esteem it a light matter if therewith I can secure her affections," was Mattan's response.

"Go forth, then," said Ira, "and do as I have told thee, and I will give thee Hagith, my daughter, when thy days of mourning are ended."

Mattan went from thence with a light heart, and tarried not in doing as Ira had demanded. After the going down of the sun, he called to-

gether all those whom his father had defrauded, and before faithful witnesses. thus addressed them:

"You were averse to my father, and contested vainly against him for many long years. You have also sought to confer with me, but I have closed my ears against you, for who of you dare venture to step forth against me in the gates? I am a strong and mighty man, and woe to him who ventures to attack me. But know ye, this day, that not by force, nor by the strength of your hands, but only through the righteousness of my heart do I guarantee to restore to you this moment that which for long years you have unsuccessfully striven to obtain, for I fear the Lord, whose servant I am."

When Mattan had thus spoken, the poor and oppressed rejoiced, and blessed him. That evening he gave them a great feast, and after they had eaten and drank, went exultingly away. All who heard of Mattan's goodness were astonished. The people proclaimed his righteousness in the gates; the city resounded with his praise, and he was made a judge.

When the days of mourning were ended and Mattan demanded from Ira his daughter, whom he had promised him, he had to endure a grievous disappointment, for Hagith was not to be found in her father's house. Ira said to him:

"I must approach thee, bowed down with shame, for my daughter, without my consent and knowledge, has become the wife of Joram, the nobleman."

Then Mattan perceived that he had been de-

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ceived by Ira and Hagith. He also saw that he could not recall the pledges he had made; therefore, he concealed his anger and hatred with smooth words.

"Do not vex thyself, my dear friend," he said to Ira. "The Lord has allotted thy daughter to Joram. We must submit to his will. I do not repent of my good deeds. I will walk further on in the way of godliness, and will never more lay aside the robe of righteousness in which I have clothed myself. God grant that thy daughter may find peace in the house of Joram, her husband; my heart will rejoice to know of her happiness."

When Ira heard these words, he was delighted with Mattan's apparently sincere intentions. He grasped him by the hand, and spoke with great feeling:

"All just persons will praise thee, and be astonished at thy righteousness; therefore, to fill up the measure of thy favor, come with me to Joram, and tell him and my daughter that thou dost forgive them, though they have not treated thee as thy virtue and purity of heart deserve. For on account of this matter their joy hitherto has not been full."

"Let us go," said Mattan quietly.

They went to Joram, and Ira told of Mattan's magnanimity. Joram said to Mattan:

"Behold! I see thy face as the face of God; be thou henceforth my faithful friend. I will return thy love."

From that time Mattan associated as a friend with Joram, but in the depths of his heart he

hated him, and resolved to ruin him if ever he found opportunity.

* * *

Hananel, one of Ephraim's nobles, dwelt in Samaria. He was accustomed to go up to Jerusalem to attend the Feasts, and to present himself before the Lord. Once when he went up to celebrate the Feast of the Tabernacles, as was his custom, he took with him his seventeen-year-old daughter, Thirza. She was very amiable and beautiful. When she entered the city, the sons of the princes were struck with her beauty. Jedidjah also looked upon her, and longed for her favor. In order to become acquainted with her, he prepared a feast to which he invited Hananel, with his beautiful daughter, his friend Joram, and his two wives, the sons of the prophets, and other pious men among his friends. When they had taken wine, and their hearts were merry, Jedidjah said to Hananel:

"Look around thee! All that is beautiful and precious that the eye can behold is in Jerusalem. Let thy daughter be as one of its jewels. Oh! that she might ever bloom as a rose therein!"

"She will certainly bloom," answered Hananel, "when I plant her in a cheerful garden, where she shall drink of heaven's dew."

"Oh! that I might prepare such a garden for thy daughter!" exclaimed Jedidjah, "my love would be as the dew of heaven, and all the goods and possessions with which God has so richly

blessed me would be the fertile soil in which she should grow and thrive."

Hananel then said:

"For more than a year many illustrious sons of Ephraim have knocked at my door and sought to obtain my child, but she has proudly disdained them and their riches, and turned to me with these words: 'Ephraim is joined to his idols, let him alone. My soul's desire is for a man of Judea, an inhabitant of Jerusalem.' So I have brought her hither to give her to the man of her choice. Speak, therefore, with the maiden, and if thou dost find favor in her sight, I will bless thy union in the name of Jehovah."

So Jedidjah went to Thirza and asked:

"Noble maiden, how doth Zion please thee, and what dost thou think of her inhabitants?"

"Zion lies before me as the Garden of Eden, and her inhabitants walk herein, as the angels of the Lord," was Thirza's response.

"Thou makest me proud with thy words, for I am an inhabitant of Jerusalem," said Jedidjah.

The maiden replied:

"Truly all its inhabitants may be proud, and hold their heads high, if they resemble thee."

"My only wish," was Jedidjah's response, "is that my life may speak loudly for me; with her whom I love, I shall be contented when my conduct, and that which I possess, shall awaken an echo in the soul of her who is dearer to me than all others."

"The Lord bless her who is so dear to thee!" exclaimed Thirza.

Jedidjah seizing her hand, cried:

"The Lord bless thee, thou noble one, and make thee a blessing to me."

The maiden bowed low and said graciously:

"Be thou, thyself, my mouth-piece to my father, his reply will agree with the wish of my heart."

While they were conversing, Hananel entered and said to his daughter, in assent to her last words:

"Dearest, if thou wouldest know my mind, I say to thee that the man who stands before thee, appears to me the fairest of ten thousand."

Then Jedidjah laughed.

"Thy daughter does not see me as thou dost," he said, "for I appear to her as an angel of the Lord."

Hananel interrupted him:

"Therefore, I am come as a messenger of the Lord to bless your union in the name of Jehovah, who dwells in Zion."

"Then I am thine," cried Thirza, "yet consider my words; I have chosen thee as one from among many, therefore, I will be thy one and only wife."

"Thou art mine only one. Thou shalt remain mine only one, and none other shall come between us."

With these words, Jedidjah embraced Thirza, and openly declared her his betrothed. Thereupon he distributed rich presents with a lavish hand among the sons of the prophets. A few days after Thirza became his wife, Hananel re-

mained with his son-in-law and was never weary of beholding his daughter's happiness, for Jedidjah loved her as the apple of his eye.

Toward the end of Hananel's sojourn in Zion, the Philistines began to multiply their invasions upon the Lowlands and south of Judea, and to capture cities and villages. Joram, who was one of the captains of the army, prepared to go against the enemy. Just at this period, a third son was born to Hagith, his wife. Joram named him Azrikam, for he said, "The Lord will deliver us from our enemies!"

Helah also had a son, whom she named Nabal. Hagith chose Helah for Azrikam's nurse, and Helah had to give her own child into the care of one of the slaves. Now Achan was sorely vexed at having to give his child into a stranger's hands.

One day, Joram invited Jedidjah to his summer home which was on the Mount of Olives.

"Behold! tomorrow, I must go to battle, and who knows whether I shall return in safety?" said Joram to his friend. "For that reason let us make a covenant, which shall include our children also. If I fall in battle or am taken captive, be thou a father to my household and watch over my children. Appoint whomsoever thou wilt upon my estates and thou mayest remove, at thy pleasure, those who already hold positions, save Sithri, one of the sons of the prophets in Carmel, and his aged brother, Abisai, because they are God-fearing men, and kinsmen of Naomi, my wife. The Lord may bless through thy wife, Thirza, and my wife Naomi. Should ever the

one have a son, and the other a daughter, in due time they might be united. As I love thee, so Naomi, my wife, loves thy Thirza. How great then will be the love of our children! The fruit from Carmel thou shalt devote to providing for the sons of the prophets. A table shall be spread at every feast for four hundred poor people, widows and orphans, as has always been the custom of my house. The summer house is thine. I give it to thee."

"The most costly jewel cannot be compared in value to the love of a faithful friend," was Jedidjah's quick response. "Take, therefore, my seal-ring, place it upon thy right hand. May it be to thee evermore a token of true love. Go in peace, may the Lord go with thee! If God shall one day bring thee safely back we will sacrifice the thank offerings and rejoice with our families, in this very summer house."

When Jedidjah ceased speaking, the two friends kissed each other and separated.

When next the morning-star arose, Joram gathered his household together. He blessed them all, kissed his two wives, tore himself with tears from the arms of his beloved Naomi and departed with the host.

Soon after these events, Thirza had a daughter whom Jedidjah named Thamar. Hananel ordered a ring to be made, on which his name and Thamar's were engraved in fine characters. He gave this to Thirza.

"This ring," he said, "shall be a pledge to thee that Thamar is to have an equal portion

among my sons; when she is older, she is to wear it."

Hananel tarried another month at Zion, then he blessed his children, and returned to Samaria.

A messenger soon after appeared with the news that Joram had been captured by the Philistines. There was great mourning in Jedidjah's house. Naomi wept incessantly, but Hagith rejoiced at seeing her companion's intense grief, and comforted herself over her husband's captivity, with these words: "Now Naomi will not exalt herself over me, for I will be the mistress of the house." This she said insolently, and she carried herself accordingly, exercising severe rule over all the servants, and punishing the slightest fault with cruelty and harshness. Naomi paid no attention to this because her whole soul overflowed with grief for her husband.

Achan stifled his rage, when he saw how heavily Hagith's hand rested upon Helah and how she was tormented and beaten like a base-born slave, but he formed many schemes for freeing his wife and himself from their oppression.

CHAPTER II

The Unrighteous Judge

UDGE MATTAN heard what had taken place in Joram's house. He was still further displeased because Joram had shown less confidence in him than in Jedidjah, whom also he had for a long time hated. He had hoped that in the event of Joram's departure, the overseeing of his affairs would have been transferred to him. However, he was greatly delighted at hearing the tidings of Joram's captivity and thought, "Now, at last the long expected day on which I can put in the sickle and destroy this detested house, has dawned." He therefore hastened to Joram's dwelling and comforted Naomi and Hagith with consoling words in which his heart had no part. He saw with pleasure that Hagith must spend her youth in mourning as a widow, while her husband was still living.

One day he approached Hagith's apartment just as she was cruelly beating her maid, Helah. When she perceived him she desisted and said:

"I have appointed my maid as nurse for my son, Azrikam, yet I can hardly be absent for a moment without her running over to the slave-woman's house to quiet her child, Nabal, the scare-crow."

Achan beheld this scene. He was mortified because his wife had endured such shameful treatment, even in his presence, and moreover before a stranger. He began to weep, and, turning to Mattan, he complained:

"Master, judge thou my wife's offense. I found my child alone and helpless in his cradle. He cried loudly, but none of the slave-women troubled themselves about him. I called his mother hither to quiet the child. If I have done wrong, my mistress should punish me, not my wife."

Then Hagith began to abuse Achan:

"Oh! thou good-for-nothing menial! Who bade thee to remain in my house? Why didst thou not go hence at the seventh year, when thou hadst thy choice to go or stay? Didst thou not allow thine ear to be bored, as a sign that thou didst refuse freedom and choose slavery? Did not my husband, before going to battle, ask thee if thou wished thy freedom and didst thou not reply, 'Leave me in thy house, for here are my wife and my children'? Therefore be silent or else my hand will rest heavily upon thee, too."

Mattan saw and heard how disorderly matters stood in Joram's house, yet remained silent. As he went away he muttered:

"Achan is but a faintly burning log, yet I will soon stir up his wrath and he will become a flaming fire, a burning torch with which in due season I will revenge myself on Hagith for all the evil she has done me."

One evening, soon after, Achan sought Judge Mattan and said to him:

"Sir, thou hast seen the wrong which I endure; therefore, consider the matter and counsel me how to free myself from this wicked woman. Verily, the slave's life is already hard enough, yet should he unjustly be doomed to destruction?"

"Thine anger burns like fire," said Mattan, "and it might lighten thy heart if with the flame of thy wrath thou shouldst set all Joram's palaces on fire and burn them and their inhabitants to ashes."

Achan's eyes sparkled with unholy desire and he breathlessly asked:

"Sir, art thou in earnest, or dost thou mock thy servant?"

Mattan answered:

"What would it profit me to mock one already overwhelmed with shame and grief?"

Achan now perceived what Mattan desired.

"Should Naomi, who has been a good mistress to me, suffer on account of Hagith's hard-heartedness?" he asked.

Mattan saw that he had brought Achan to the desired point. He arose and said:

"Listen to my counsel. Burn Hagith's palace and her servants' houses. First, bring thy little son to thy wife, but give Azrikam to the slave-women, that he may be destroyed with the others. Each of the children is one month old. No one will notice the exchange. Even Jedidjah and Thirza will have no suspicion, for they are unfriendly to the detested Hagith and have scarcely seen her child. Thou shalt spare Naomi's house, that thy crime may rest upon her, and that it may

be said, 'The jealousy of Naomi has devoured the dwellings of Joram.' I will take care that Naomi shall depart, never to return. Then none of thy master's house shall be left. Thy son Nabal shall be called Azrikam and shall be the sole heir of Joram's treasures, his fields and vineyards, his herds and wine presses. This shall be thy harvest, but the gleanings shall belong to me. Before thou hast kindled the fire, remove all the valuables from Joram's treasure chambers. I will send to your assistance Chepher and Bukjah, two crafty, artful men, but considered by the whole city to be honorable persons. They will bring the treasure to me. Here is a key to the treasure house. When I was Joram's friend I had it made. I do this, because Joram tore from me what I dearly valued. He craftily robbed me of Hagith, for whom I vainly gave up all my father's wealth. His treasure shall now serve as a recompense for all my losses."

Achan's heart beat loudly. Over and over again he exclaimed:

"Satan himself could not have contrived a better plot!"

Mattan warned him to be cautious and told him to come again. Achan followed Mattan's directions, and made all arrangements for carrying out his purpose, but kept his intention of exchanging the children from Chepher and Bukjah.

One dark and dismal night, when the clouds swept over the sky and the wind rushed over the earth and the household was sleeping soundly, Achan emptied his master's treasure chambers.

Chepher and Bukjah stood ready to carry everything to Mattan, who hid all the treasure in his private cave. After that Achan ascended to the roof of the houses which he wished to burn and scattered sulphur upon them. He then went to the slave's wing, took away his child and barred the door on the outside. Helah did likewise in Hagith's apartments. When this was done, Achan fired the buildings at each of the four corners. Immediately the flames shot up everywhere, while a frightful pillar of smoke rose to the sky.

Achan waited till the fire had gained control, then he ran to Naomi's house, where, it being some distance away, all were sleeping peacefully. He held his hands above his head and shrieked:

"Wake up, my mistress. A terrible fire is consuming Joram's dwelling and there is no one there to extinguish it. My wife jumped out of the window with Hagith's little one. Hagith sought to save both of her other children, but the flames had already seized them. All are burned. Oh! Woe! Nabal my son is also there, for he had been in the slavehouse."

While he thus mourned before Naomi, Chepher and Bukjah passed under the windows and one said to the other, in a loud voice:

"See, Naomi's jealousy has hitherto burned in secret, but to-day it has burst into a bright flame and destroyed Joram's dwellings."

Naomi trembled when she heard these words, and she cried:

"A shameful plot has been arranged and all the guilt will fall upon me. Oh, woe is me! Where shall I flee, where shall I hide myself?"

"Disguise thyself, my mistress, in men's clothing and escape until the storm is over," said Achan, "for I fear the friends of Hagith will force an entrance and require her blood at thy hands."

Naomi followed Achan's advice, and sprang out of the window to save her life. Achan said to the two maids:

"Leave this place and come with me, and I will take you where you may be safe till this turmoil is over."

He led them to the treasure chamber, barred the door and fired that also. The unfortunate sacrifices screamed in agony, but the smoke and flames stifled their cries and they were consumed.

"There is no one remaining of the house of Joram," said Achan to his wife. "Therefore, our deed can not be betrayed. So embrace Nabal, kiss him, and henceforth call him Azrikam."

Gradually the neighbors, whom the alarm of fire had awakened, gathered together around the scene of the disaster. Achan and Helah changed their demeanor and began to mourn and lament. Jedidjah and Thirza came without delay. When they saw the destruction, they wrung their hands, crying:

"Woe! Woe!"

They hastened quickly to Naomi's house, but found it deserted. Then they returned to Achan and Helah, asking:

"Where is Naomi?"

"Alas!" Achan cried: "what a misfortune the Almighty has sent upon us! Listen to what I know of the matter. I hastened this morning to my work in the field. On my return, as I came near our house there was an awful smell, like burning sulphur. I saw that in delay was danger and ran as quickly as I could to save my mistress, Hagith and her children. I arrived there just as Hagith handed Azrikam out of the window to my wife. Hagith ran back to rescue the other two children, but the flames laid hold of them and they were all burned. Since there were no more to be helped I hastened to Naomi, but could not find her. Now, for the first time, I thought of our own child, and flew to the slaves' wing to save him if there was yet time. Woe to me! I came too late!"

Helah also wept, lamented and said:

"Unmerciful as hell was the jealousy between Joram's two wives! Now my Nabal has also become a victim of the flames! Woe!" And Achan cried again: "How Hagith did abuse the mild Naomi! She upbraided her with cruel words and wicked remarks. 'Be thou no longer proud of Joram's love,' she cried after her, 'for Joram is dead and my sons will inherit his wealth. They will become great and drive thee away and thou wilt have no portion of the inheritance, because thou art a stranger in these houses.' "

Jedidjah and Thirza trembled at all they had seen and heard. Immediately Hagith's kinsfolk came, seeking revenge. They were in a rage and cried:

"Where is Naomi, the murderess?"

"Bring Azrikam to my house," Jedidjah said to Helah. "Abide there and be his nurse as hitherto, so that this spark on Joram's stem be not extinguished."

Meanwhile the relatives and friends of Hagith ceased not crying:

"Where is Naomi, the serpent, the blood-thirsty hyena? Oh! that she were here, that with her blood we might quench the fire which her hands kindled!"

Jedidjah sought as far as possible to quiet them.

"Time will reveal her hiding-place," he said.

Now, Naomi had sought shelter with Abisai, her kinsman, the overseer of her husband's flocks in Bethlehem, but Abisai sent her to his brother Sithri, who offered her a hiding-place in a remote valley near Mt. Carmel. Twelve days later, the unfortunate woman gave birth to twins, a boy and a girl. She named the boy Amnon and the girl Penina. After this, Sithri went to Jerusalem to confer with Jedidjah concerning Joram's possessions. When he entered the gate, he heard Chepher and Bukjah testifying before the elders:

"When we returned recently from the land of the Philistines, we met Naomi, Joram's wife, on the road which leads to Ekron. She was in a wagon drawn by a team of mules, seated by the side of a young man. After the teams came camels, laden with all sorts of goods, with two maid-servants mounted on them. We asked Naomi where she was going with all those goods. She answered, that she was traveling to the

princes of the Philistines to purchase her husband's freedom and that the man who sat beside her was Joram's messenger. We said, 'God grant thee thy heart's desire and bless thy undertaking. Mayest thou safely return with thy husband Joram to the land of his birth!' When we came to Jerusalem, we could not believe our ears when we heard of the horrible calamities which had overtaken Joram's house. Therefore we have come before the elders to testify what we have seen with our eyes and heard with our ears."

When the elders and judges heard these words they with one voice exclaimed:

"Now all appears plain to us, and we can no longer doubt Naomi's guilt."

Judge Mattan rose up and said:

"Let this crime be written in the judge's book of remembrance, and thus the sin of Naomi will be ever before the elders in the gate."

When Mattan had informed Jedidjah of the judicial proceedings, the latter exclaimed:

"It is clear as the sun at noonday that jealousy alone has destroyed many souls in Joram's house. Yes, crime, shame and misfortune have come upon the house of my best friend. Naomi, whom he loved above all others, has become faithless to him, for scarcely was he in the power of his enemies before she set fire to his house and suffered Hagith, whom she detested, and her children to be consumed. Even then, the measure of her evil deeds was not full, for she left her dwelling secretly and fled with her lover."

"Verily, it is so," Thirza added. "Therefore it is better to take but one wife and to bestow love

on her alone. This have we done, and so will we decide for Thamar, our daughter, when the time will come for her to be spoken for."

Jedidjah said again:

"If Naomi committed such an awful crime, she could not have loved Joram faithfully and sincerely, therefore her children can not be treated as Joram's heirs. Azrikam remains, the only scion on Joram's stem. Our Thamar is already espoused to him, according to the covenant which I made with his father, but she shall be his only wife."

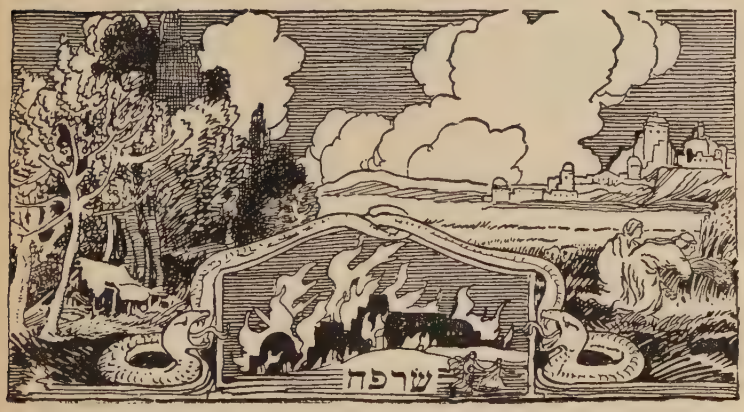
Thus spoke Jedidjah of the false Azrikam, and cast a pitiful glance upon this last member of Joram's house.

Toward the close of the year, Thirza bore a son, and they named him Theman. The three children grew up together in Jedidjah's house. Theman and Thamar bloomed like two lovely flowers, but Azrikam grew like a thorn bush. His heart was corrupt from his youth and there was no comeliness about him. Jedidjah, however, looked not on his outward appearance, because of the covenant, which he had made with his father.

Sithri, while in Jerusalem, had seen that wicked people heaped reproach upon Naomi's name, that false witnesses swore against her, that there was no one to contradict their evidence, and therefore he carefully hid his mistress and her children in the fastnesses of Carmel, and his wife brought them provisions. When the children were old enough, she weaned them. Then Sithri sent Amnon to his brother Abisai, who gave him to one of his old shepherds to bring up. The

shepherd was to say he had bought the boy of an unknown man, who had found him abandoned in a field. Amnon so grew up among the shepherds. He was beautiful in person, still no one cared greatly for him. Abisai alone treated him with affection and when the old shepherd in whose care he had been placed died, he gave him a place among his boys, who tended Joram's sheep. So Amnon passed among his companions as a bondman.

Six years after the fire, Naomi ventured to come forth from her hiding-place. Sithri gave her a hut in a deep valley. It was surrounded by cypress trees. Here she dwelt with her daughter and an old woman. She went gleaning in Joram's fields, with the other poor women of the neighborhood, and called herself a Philistine woman. She told the people she had married a man of Judea and that he was dead.



CHAPTER III

The Priest of Baal

THE measure of Ephraim's sin was full, and the land became ripe for God's anger and punishment in the fourth year of King Hezekiah's reign. Then the Lord laid his correcting hand on Israel. He permitted the Assyrian king with his forces to overrun the land. This king carried away the calves from Beth-Aven and the idols from Dan. He took the captured idolators during his invasion on his march to Halah and Habor, situated on the river Gozan and to the cities of Media.

Judah beheld the punishment, which the Lord permitted Israel to suffer and perceived how the Almighty's hand fell heavily upon the degenerate kingdom; therefore, he strengthened himself in the Lord and repented. The children of Judah increased their forces and remained faithful to God, walking in His ways. They gladly hearkened to David's son, their king Hezekiah, and to Isaiah, son of Amos, who were friends of God. Therefore, Judah had peace and freedom, while Ephraim was in deep affliction.

An Ephraimite fugitive, who had escaped from the Assyrians, fled at this time to Jerusalem. He halted on his way before entering Zion, took

out an idol which he had brought with him, and threw it on the ground.

"Lie there in thy weakness, thou piece of carved wood! Thou art useless in the land of Judea. I have served thee as priest for ten long years. I have borne thee, and lifted thee up before the eyes of thy servants. I have taught them thy fear. Thou wast my god, and I was thy mouthpiece. With the other priests I murdered and robbed on the way to Shechem, and thy permission shielded me. I drank thy wine, which was presented to thee and ate the flesh of the sacrifices slain for thee. Thou hast also provided me with clothing. I have seen pleasant days with thee and merry was the first period of my priesthood. Alas, all this is now at an end! Thy temples are destroyed, the enemy has driven the calves from Beth-Aven. Whither shall I go with thee? Shall I bring thee to Zion? No, because thou couldst not withstand the mighty God who reigns therein. Thou wouldst be in my way. So then, lie there, naked and destitute, for behold, I take away thy silver cover and thy gold ornament. They cannot help thee, but they will repay me for my long service and all my labor for thee."

The fugitive who thus spoke was Zimri, a priest of Baal. He had hitherto belonged to those abandoned men who lay in wait along the roads and lanes to hinder the children of Israel from going up to worship God on His holy hill. Lately, with many of his fellow-inhabitants, he had been in prison, whence, as he was very light-footed, he had hoped to escape. While there he made the acquaintance of Hananel, the Samaritan noble-

man, and had besought him to tell him the name of his son-in-law in Jerusalem. Hananel willingly consented and gave him a sealed letter, and a seal, with the order to carry them to Jerusalem, to Jedidjah, when he should escape. Not long after they came to the river Chebar, Zimri succeeded in escaping. He had brought his idol all the way long, because he thought continually, "Perhaps I shall light upon some worshipers on the way, or there may be an opportunity to erect an altar to which we might draw near." Now he knew that no one in Jerusalem worshipped idols, so he stripped it of its ornaments, and then threw it away.

Zimri entered the city of God through the Ephraim gate just as the twilight was deepening. The streets were still full of life. Everywhere people were coming and going, running, walking, and riding. Light wagons jostled against richly ornamented chariots, filled with nobles and rich people, and the hum and roar of traffic resounded from every direction. Zimri, who had taken part in the three years' siege of Samaria and had beheld all the poverty and distress which the city had endured at the hands of the kings of Assyria and their armies, was astonished at this spectacle of peaceful activity which presented itself before his eyes. He exclaimed:

"How base is Samaria and how splendid is Zion! The streets of Samaria resound with woeful cries. Jerusalem reechoes with the bustle of peaceful labor. The land of Ephraim is trodden under the foot and spoiled, Judea shines with ornaments and excellence. Behold I find here a

new heaven and a new earth, a land whose inhabitants dwell in peace. The sun shines brightly upon them, and blessings stream from every star. The king exalts justice and righteousness and walks in the ways of the Lord, therefore the whole country prospers. Verily, virtue and righteousness are ever a strong defense, but only for the rich, because they protect his wealth, so that no strange hand can grasp it. They are like thorns for a poor man, like me, for my prop has been broken, my bread taken from me, and my fountain of water choked, since the time when Hezekiah destroyed the images of Baal. Could he also destroy Baal's commandments? No! for Baal's law is deceit and malice and his service is fraud, robbery, violence and murder. No king is able to put these away from the hearts of all his subjects. Well, Zimri! begin anew and seek for impostors and defrauders in Jerusalem. Thou wilt surely discover such, for the larger the city the more numerous the knaves. Are there not multitudes of rich and illustrious people here? Is envy to be absent? Where envy unites itself with craftiness, and energy joins hands with cunning, there the hand of Baal manifests itself. What need have we of altars for our idols, when we can sacrifice to them wherever we are, with heart, mouth and hands? The time will come when the poor man shall rouse himself from his hard bed, shake the straw from his head, and seat himself beside the rich and mighty. Virtue and righteousness dwell in the gates of Zion, therefore I also will gird myself about with honesty and fill my mouth with pious words, while I hide

my wickedness in the secret recesses of my heart. I will bow my head as a bulrush. My lips shall overflow with zealous, upright, God-fearing speech. Many wise people have established themselves firmly on such a foundation, and thereby thou, too, wilt be blessed: for who is so blind as a true servant of God? Who is so deaf as a pious, sincere man? A pious man is but a poor judge of human nature. He can not see into the heart of his neighbor and judge him by his words and deeds, because, to the pure in heart all things are pure. If, now, I so conduct my business that it appears honest outwardly, who shall examine my heart? Well! Craftiness shall borrow a garment from her opposite, Truth."

Zimri made no delay in carrying out his purpose. The next morning he went up to the Temple of the Lord. He met there the high priest, Azariah, of the house of Zadok, and said to him:

"Oh, master, lend thine ear to the petition of thy servant. I am the son of a nobleman of Ephraim and have from my earliest youth been brought up in the fear of Baal and according to the teachings of his priests and prophets. For that reason I esteemed the words of Jehovah as mockery and the teachings of his holy prophets as infamy. Behold! my father gave me sour grapes to eat. Shall his son's teeth, therefore, be forever set on edge? Lo! my eyes have been opened, that the counsel of God rests in the words of his servants, the prophets in Judea. Ephraim has become a desert. My people have suffered terrible afflictions and have been driven from their inheritance. Samaria has suffered a distressing

siege. For three long years she has crouched under the strokes of her chastiser. Now, the silence of death hangs over her streets. Her priests and prophets were false leaders, who, by their teachings, hastened on her destruction. Therefore, they go now with drooping lips, like lepers, and are ashamed of their own wickedness. Through the grace of God, I have escaped from the enemy's power, because He saw how my soul panted after the courts of the Lord. Now I hunger after His words and thirst after His grace; I have fled to thee, thou anointed priest of the Lord. Show me the way to serve Jehovah, and how to atone before His face for the sins of my youth. I can bring neither sacrifice nor whole-offering, for I am poor, but I will consecrate my entire being to the Lord. I can offer thee neither money nor goods. I can only beseech thee, on account of thy compassion, to teach me concerning the true God."

The high priest answered:

"The Lord bids all the children of Aaron, the wise men, and the guardians of the Torah not to accept gifts from those who seek counsel and instruction from them. Our bread is given and our water is sure. We know no need, because our wants are all supplied, through tithes and free-will offerings. For this reason all our desires and endeavors are directed toward the instruction of those who with sincere hearts seek after God. Behold, 'a broken heart and a contrite spirit' are as acceptable to the Lord now as in the olden time. Therefore, visit God's Temple daily, then thou wilt find the path of life. But

now, tell me, hast thou kinsfolk in Zion, or dost thou tarry here as a guest?"

Zimri answered:

"To-day I must seek Jedidjah, the king's treasurer. I have brought him a letter from his father-in-law, Hananel, who, with others, was carried away from Samaria."

"Remain here until evening," said the priest. "Every morning and evening, when the priests offer the daily sacrifices, Jedidjah comes up to pray in this holy place, for he is a pious man. I will intercede with him for you. Perhaps he may find a place for you in his own household, for he is one of Judea's noblemen with whom one may dwell in peace."

At twilight Jedidjah came, as was his wont, to the Temple. After his prayers were ended, the high priest spoke to him of Zimri, and so praised his piety that Jedidjah at once took the Samaritan home to his own house. Zimri delivered Hananel's letter to Jedidjah, but retained the seal, for he thought that it might at some time be useful as an instrument of deceit. Jedidjah opened the letter, which he read to his wife and children.

These are the words of the letter:

"Listen, my daughter Thirza, and Jedidjah, my son-in-law. Attend to the words of your father Hananel, the prisoner. Ye have doubtless heard the cry of Ephraim and the wail of Samaria hath reached the gates of Zion. Alas! the days of wrath! Samaria is destroyed, her king, her people, are shut up in prison. When I foresaw Ephraim's downfall, I exchanged all my pos-

sessions for gold, silver and precious stones. These treasures are hidden in a secret place, which no man's eyes can find, for I thought that when the days of confusion were ended, I would go to Jerusalem with my goods and my children. I thought thus, but the Lord in his wrath hath otherwise decided. All my children died during the siege and the days of need. Afterwards the days of wrath overtook us, the walls of the city fell and the enemy slew many in the streets. I was forced to leave the graves of my children and all my treasures, and at the head of a company of my fellow-townsmen was taken captive.

"After traveling six days, we came to the river Chebar at twilight on the seventh day. Here we halted. I ate my bread with tears and fell asleep. Behold! I saw in a dream a handsome youth, with sparkling eyes. He was richly clothed and was mounted on a fiery horse. He bore a sword at his side and wore a glistening helmet on his head. His raven-black locks played about his neck. His cheeks were like ruddy apples. His brow was white as snow, and pure as milk. When I beheld his figure, which seemed as if carved from sapphire, I wept bitterly and cried 'Oh! my Lord God, I also had children as handsome as this young man, now there is none to close my eyes or reap the fruits of my labor!' When the young man heard my lamentation, he alighted from his horse, grasped my right hand and said to me, in a clear, ringing voice, 'My soul longs after Thamar, thy grand-daughter. My desire is so great, it longs to bring thee out of thy captivity, that thou mayest go back with me to

thy loved ones in Zion, to share there in the light of God.' I asked him his name, descent and family. He answered, 'My words must remain hidden until they are revealed.' Then he showed me the ring which I gave Thamar and said, 'This is the token of our covenant, which my beloved Thamar has given me.' Here I awoke and found it was a dream.

"This wonderful dream fell upon me like a ray of hope in my troubles. I lifted my eyes to the heavens, where the stars shone in the firmament, while the earth was clothed in darkness, and cried to God and besought Him that in like manner the dreams of the night might illumine my soul.

"After a while I fell asleep again. Then I dreamed that I sat in thine ivory palace. Thamar advanced as a bride and this young man, attired in costly raiment, came and stood before us and they gazed lovingly at each other. The youth seemed about to speak to me, when I awoke, and heard the voice of my tormentor, 'Why dost thou sleep? Arise! and prepare to go forward with the prisoners, for the morning broke long since.' I arose with bitterness of heart, but my soul was like one stunned. It astonished me that I had twice seen the same figure. I inquired the meaning from the interpreters of dreams. They told me the dreams were full of significance. Therefore my soul has much hope in Thamar's beloved. He will deliver me from the power of my enemy and become the heir to my hidden treasures in Samaria.

"Therefore, my dear children, retain this dream in your remembrance and ponder it in your hearts. The grace and peace of God be with you all."

Jedidjah and Thirza wept when they read this letter.

Zimri said to them:

"Weep not over thy father, for he escaped from the terrible siege and if he must dwell in a strange land, he will find himself even in distant Assyria still among his own companions. The dream at the river Chebar is also a great consolation to him, for he firmly believes that it will all be fulfilled."

While Zimri spoke, Thirza's eyes rested upon Azrikam, whose figure so little resembled the youth of Hananel's dreams. Jedidjah perceiving this, sent him away.

"Believe not these dreams," he said to his wife, "thy father may cherish this consolation in his misfortune, but thou, my love, depend not upon such things. Do not compare our Azrikam with the youth of the visions, for he does not resemble him in the least. His hair is not black, but of uncertain color, and he is neither slight nor well built. Through such fancies thou wilt turn the heart of Thamar from him. I have made a covenant with Joram, and a dream shall not revoke that which I have promised."

"Who knows?" Thirza persisted. "Perhaps Naomi may have had a son who resembles this youth."

Jedidjah continued:

"Naomi has gone thence with her lover, and even if she has such a son, who could remove from him the disgrace which rests upon his mother? He would ever be known as the son of an abandoned woman, and if Joram were ever to return, he would have no mercy upon him, but would drive him away. Yet why do we argue over an idle tale? Naomi will never return after committing such abominable crimes, for the people would point the finger of scorn at her and besides, the sword of justice hangs over her head. Therefore, my love, let us speak no more of her, and let us forget her name, for she is a blot upon Joram's whole house."

Jedidjah was renowned throughout all Judea for his faithfulness to God, and his love to his fellows. He never observed men closely in order to prove their sincerity, but took them in good faith for what they appeared. An open countenance and a modest demeanor were ever to him evidences of a pure heart. Many took advantage of his unsuspicious nature, and the number of those who, through a show of humility and sincerity, sought to win his favor, constantly increased. It was no wonder that Zimri, by means of a pious demeanor and virtuous conversation, succeeded in establishing himself in his good graces, especially since the high priest had so highly spoken of him.

One day, Jedidjah said to him:

"If thou art content, I will give thee a name and position in my house."

"Sir, I am ready to serve thee with a sincere and faithful heart," Zimri replied.

Zimri had little desire for work and honest gain. He wished to obtain riches with the least possible exertion. As he learned more and more of the condition of affairs in the households of Joram and Jedidjah, he readily perceived that there was a broad field for his foul purposes. Above all things else, he carefully concealed the seal which Hananel had given him for Jedidjah, for he reflected: "This seal will perhaps serve me as a true treasure and a valuable instrument."

Azrikam, at this time, still dwelt in Jedidjah's house. He was now a boy of ten years, and Thamar and Theman, Jedidjah's children, were his playmates. Though still so young, he showed what his disposition was, for he tormented Thamar and Theman and provoked them to quarrel with him whenever possible. This greatly troubled Jedidjah and Thirza. The latter could not refrain from expressing her opinion of the quarrelsome lad.

"The apple falls not far from the tree. Hagith quarreled with all about her, and her son is never easy unless he is quarreling," she said. As for Thamar and Theman, they could not endure Azrikam.

When Jedidjah saw that his friend's son was a disturber in his house, disliked by all, he sent him to live on Joram's land, so that his children should no longer wrangle with him. At the same time, he hoped that while he was away from Thamar's eyes, her heart might turn to him. Jedidjah also gave Achan to Azrikam, with the charge to care for the lad and guard him as the

apple of his eye. Achan was to bring the lad home every Sabbath, every new moon and every holiday. Achan rejoiced over this commission and always came punctually. This secured for him Jedidjah's esteem.

Azrikam grew as a sharp thorn in Joram's household and the older he grew, the homelier he became, but Thamar became more beautiful day by day. They differed greatly, not only in outward apearance, but also in manner and disposition. Azrikam's eyes had no friendly gaze for the servants of his house and his hand was ever closed against the poor. He boasted of his riches and of the reputation of his forefathers, and was ashamed to associate with the boys of his acquaintance who were not the sons of princes. Thamar walked in meekness among her playmates, and never neglected the daughters of the poor. Azrikam was like a wooden idol, covered with gold and silver, which hid its real worthlessness from the beholder. Thamar was like a sapphire set in gold, whose value the noble metal did not enhance but simply lent a brighter luster to it, while Azrikam was awkwardly formed. When he was seventeen, he was still very short. His red-haired head sat like a gourd on his extremely broad shoulders, and his face was thickly covered with freckles. Thamar on the contrary grew in beauty like a palm tree, and when she was sixteen had become a wonderfully beautiful maiden. She was slender, with a graceful carriage. Her voice was clear and sweet. She was the joy of her parents and a true pleasure to all eyes. In a word, Azrikam and Thamar were as

different from each other as could be imagined. Only the firm will of Jedidjah, who would not break his covenant with Joram, sought their union. Many sons of noblemen and princes had already sought to obtain Thamar, but Jedidjah, on account of his promise, refused her hand to all.

Now Thirza had concealed Hananel's letter in a chest. When Thamar had grown up, she found it one day by chance and read it. She reflected much over her grandfather's dreams, and thoughts before unknown began to stir in her mind and the image of the lovely youth followed her, sleeping or waking. The more she thought of the lovely youth the more she hated Azrikam, and when she met him she trembled.

Hananel's letter and Thamar's reveries vexed Azrikam.

One day he called Zimri to his house and said to him:

"See, the letter which thou didst bring with thee from Hananel has turned Thamar's mind from me. Her heart is gradually being alienated from me, because she lives and moves and has her being only in Hananel's dreams, and all her thoughts are upon a youth who never existed. Thou, Zimri, hast estranged her from me; now endeavor through thy wisdom to restore again her heart to me. For this good deed I will richly reward thee, and will give thee what thou dost demand."

"I know that Thamar is dearer to thee than all thy treasures," was Zimri's answer. "I know also, that her heart is removed far from thee, and

that with all thy silver and gold thou canst not purchase it. Still there is nothing which can not be accomplished through craft and deceit, but dishonest hands do nothing without money. When thou shalt place the required sum at my disposal, I shall gladly be at thy service. I have already a plan in my mind. Give me three days in which to consider it."

Three days after, Azrikam inquired of Zimri if he had completed his plans. He answered:

"Above all else, thou must give me thine absolute confidence. We must first seek to shake Thamar's faith in the dreams which stand in thy way. We must make her doubtful of their truth or remove them from her knowledge, but I must find the means to turn her heart gradually to thee. Now give me three hundred silver shekels, with which I will hire a man to carry out my plans. Still, I repeat, trust me entirely. Thus only can I succeed."

To which Azrikam replied:

"Thou knowest that I cling fast to money, still no price is too dear for me to win Thamar. Thou shalt receive tenfold from me, when thou hast concluded the matter."

Zimri then betook himself to a man who lived on the borders of Judea, gave him Hananel's seal, presented him with a sum of money and put into his mouth the words which he should say to Jedidjah.

This man went to Jedidjah and said:

"Thy servant has just returned from Assyria, where I saw Hananel upon his death bed. He called me to him and asked, 'Art not thou from

Judea?' When I answered him that I was, he continued: 'If the Lord shall deliver thee from captivity, carry this to my son-in-law in Zion and say to him—' Here his speech failed him. He became confused and could utter only disconnected words: 'I buried my treasure—and swear to me—tell no one about it.' He became speechless and never finished his message. The death angel had seized him and he remained palsied. The next day he died. God has brought me back to my fatherland and I have brought you his seal."

Jedidjah heard the man's story, then he took the messenger to his wife, related to her what the man had told him, and exclaimed:

"All our hopes have come to naught!"

Thirza could not believe her husband. She thought he was deceiving her in order to shake Thamar's faith in Hananel's dreams. Jedidjah swore to her that it was no falsehood. She now believed him, and wept bitterly over her father's death. Thamar also mourned for Hananel, but she ceased not to hate Azrikam.

When her father spoke to her on the matter, she replied:

"So long as Azrikam remains at home, I willingly honor him, but when he appears before my eyes he brings his shame with him. I loathe him for his ungainly figure and arrogant demeanor. I shall never overcome this feeling."

Thirza interposed and said to Jedidjah:

"My love, cease to urge our daughter until she is eighteen or twenty. That will be soon enough to entrust Azrikam with her life."

When Azrikam perceived that Zimri already knew too much about him, and that his reputation hung on Zimri's words, he feared lest his deceit should be made known to Thamar. He therefore at once gave him another thousand silver shekels and henceforth had no secrets from him.

CHAPTER IV

Peasant and Princess

T the return of spring, Thamar asked her father to permit her to leave the noisy city and to accompany her young friends into the country, there to enjoy the springtime. Jedidjah, who could never deny her anything, consented, but instructed her to return in three days. Thamar, with her maid, Maacah, went to Bethlehem, to the house of Abisai, the overseer of Joram's flocks and herds. Her father sent Theman, his son, with three servants to Mt. Carmel, where they were to remain with Sithri until the time of vintage, when Theman was to take the first fruits to Jerusalem to present them as a thank offering before the Lord.

Bethlehem, the cradle of the kings of Judea, lay south of Jerusalem, on a pleasant hill, and was a lovely spot. It abounded in cisterns and running streams of sweet water, clear as crystal. Fruitful olive trees cast their broad shadows and the grapes yielded dark, luscious wine. Its hills were girt about with joy and gladness. Its valleys were filled with roses and all sorts of fragrant flowers. There the little lambs skipped about, the children sported and the land flowed with milk and honey. Solomon himself had made

there three pools, which served as reservoirs for clear water, which was conducted by a canal to the fountains at Jerusalem, the city of his delight. These pools shone through the green trees, like patches of silver. Beautiful willows, in whose branches pigeons and turtle-doves cooed, grew on their banks.

In this neighborhood Amnon tended the sheep of Abisai, his father Joram's steward. He was ignorant of his origin, but supposed he was a shepherd's son. His companions and all the shepherds in the place admired him on account of his fine figure and his musical talents, for he knew how to play the lute skillfully and to sing charming songs, which delighted all hearts.

The sons and daughters of the noblemen had come up to Bethlehem to enjoy the spring weather. Thamar, radiant with beauty, and clad in costly purple garments, was among the number. She abode at the house of Abisai. One morning she went with her maid, Maacah, to the shepherd's pastures, where Amnon was feeding his flocks. The shepherds saw her, and filled with wonder, they said to each other:

"Behold! she is the most beautiful of Zion's daughters."

Amnon said to them:

"Shepherds! why look ye upon that which is above us? Let us instead look down upon the resting-place of our flocks, for ought we to lift our eyes to the daughters of the nobles?"

Notwithstanding his words, he could not refrain from glancing back at her and observing from a distance her graceful gait.

The sun poured his beams over fields and meadows, and spread heat and light abroad. The little water brooks bubbled and murmured. A gentle breeze swept through the tree-tops and lightly stirred the leaves. The notes of the little birds rang out on the air; the bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the cattle joined in the chorus of the shepherds, and the mountains re-echoed the joyful sound.

Thamar and her maid returned the way they had come, and when they again reached the place where Amnon tended his sheep, he, unwilling to be outdone by his companions, lifted his voice in a song.

Both rich and poor in heavenly gifts rejoice;
It is not so with the delights of men;
In these the rich precede the poor in choice,
However, they are earthly and are vain.

On rich and poor the sun of righteousness
Doth shine. Together both rejoice in spring,
When God the fields and pastures green doth bless
With harvest rich, and shepherds pipe and sing.

The city and its noise doth God bestow
Upon the rich. Spring comes and roses fair,
Then forth unto the shepherd's home they go,
And seek what God hath given us to share.

Crowns wrought of gold and many a precious stone
The brows of kings adorn, of princes press.
Wild roses are the shepherd's crown alone
With which he decks the chosen shepherdess.

Meanwhile Thamar and her maid had seated themselves on the banks of a brook, not far away.

When she heard Amnon's song, she said to her companion, "If thou hast ears to hear, listen, and if thou hast eyes to see, look around thee!"

"Spring has scattered her gifts with bountiful hands," Maacah replied. "Whether we ride or walk, we find here loveliness, which the cities with their walls and houses lack. Now, my mistress, let us ascend the hill and view the shepherds' ranks. See, yonder they join with the shepherdesses in a round dance, and the noblemen's daughters look on with delight."

"Leave me alone," replied Thamar. "I sit here as if rooted to the spot, for the image of my dream stands before me. O happiness! I see with my own eyes the youth of whom my grandfather dreamed. He stands before me exactly as Hananel described him. Fasten thine eyes upon the shepherd, singing yonder. See his black locks, his fine, noble figure, carved, as it were, from sapphire. Is he not purer than milk and whiter than snow? How red are his cheeks! How pleasantly he moves his lips, and how sweetly his voice rings! He holds a bow in his hands. If he bore a helmet on his head, he would resemble a lordly hero in battle."

Maacah had closely observed Amnon and was also pleased with him, yet she said to Thamar:

"Nevertheless, thou shouldst not depend too much upon empty dreams, which only confuse thee and rob thee of discretion. See, Hananel is certainly dead and all his visions were idle fancies. I can easily give thee a reason for the bow in his

hand. When the Jordan rises in the spring, it is needful for the shepherds to go to the pastures armed with bow and arrow, for then the lion comes out of his lair, and the tigers, panthers and all the other wild beasts are driven out of their lurking-places by the water. They cause great destruction and render whole stretches of land unsafe. For this reason the shepherds gird themselves as heroes rushing to battle. Come now, mistress, let us mingle with the crowd, gathered on yonder hill."

Thamar would not listen to Maacah's words, but approached Amnon and said to him:

"Youth, if thy heart be as good as thy countenance, then give me the wreath which thou holdest in thine hands."

Amnon turned pale as Thamar thus addressed him.

"Take it, my lady, if thou dost not disdain receiving this token of homage from me," he answered quietly.

Thamar continued:

"I heard thee singing:

Crowns, wrought of gold and many a precious stone
The brows of kings adorn, of princes press.
Wild roses are the shepherd's crown alone
With which he decks the chosen shepherdess.'

Doubtless there is a maiden whom thou wilt gladly adorn as bride. Have I judged rightly?"

Amnon cast his eyes to the ground and replied:

"I swear to thee, my lady, that among the

thousands of maidens whom I have seen, until this day I have found no companion."

"Thou must be a very proud young man," said Thamar, "if thou seekest thy mate among ten thousand."

Maacah seized her mistress by the hand and said:

"Break off this conversation, and let us go from thence. I see a man coming hither, and it is not becoming a maiden to talk in such a manner."

So Thamar and Maacah departed, and Uz, one of Abisai's shepherds, came to Amnon and inquired:

"What said Jedidjah's daughter to thee?"

Amnon answered:

"I knew not that she was Jedidjah's daughter. Yet see, her lips drop sweetness like morning dew from roses. I am truly angry with thee because thou hast interrupted our interview."

Uz replied:

"Behold! Amnon, how high thou raisest thine eyes. Verily Thamar is handsome and lovely in manner. She girds herself with virtue and humility and is not haughty like the daughters of Jerusalem, who disregard the poor and suffer them to depart without consolation. No, Thamar is not so. She stretches out her hand to relieve their need and encourages the afflicted and castdown with friendly words. This morning, when she entered the vineyard, it seemed to me as if Aurora herself had descended and walked before me. She resembles a tender rose, bathed in morning dew."

"To me," replied Amnon, "she appears splendid as Jerusalem, glorious and brilliant as the morning sun. Loveliness and grace, beauty and meekness have united in her. Still why should I desecrate her beauty with the words of my mouth? Her image dwells deep within my heart, yet my lips fail to describe her. In a word, if this maiden should walk among the stars, she would shine like the morning star. When she walks upon the earth, the roses turn pale and are ashamed."

Uz spoke again and said:

"Cease speaking of those things which are so infinitely above thee. Forget not that thou art only a shepherd. Busy thyself with thy flocks. Care for thy lambs and be no idle dreamer."

Thamar, after they had left Amnon, said to Maacah:

"O! that I might tarry in this place my whole life long, for the wreath of flowers which adorns the shepherd's head is dearer to me than the costliest veils, bracelets and chains, wherewith the daughters of Zion adorn their necks, and the tone of his shepherd's pipe is sweeter than all the lutes and harps in the pleasure gardens of Jerusalem."

Maacah laughed as she replied:

"Yes, that young shepherd casts a spirit of sweetness over the meadows. Therefore thou art now dreaming with open eyes. Still, my mistress, I warn thee, suffer not these fantasies of thine to lead thee astray, for even if Hananel himself were living, who could exalt this shepherd to your position?"

"Cease to mock, thou fool," said Thamar. "Verily he is only a simple shepherd, but a lofty and gentle spirit pervades his whole appearance, which even his shepherd's clothing cannot conceal. How delightful are his songs, how attractive his conversation, how handsome his figure! Amiability beams from his eyes and his lips are like a pair of tulips. Could I take him to my mother's house, she would agree with me, and would not mistake these signs. Has he not the figure and appearance of the youth whom Hananel saw in his dreams? Differs he in the least?" Conversing thus they reached Abisai's house.

When evening came, Amnon collected his flocks and laid himself down to rest with the other shepherds. Thamar, likewise, repaired to her apartment and sought her couch, but sleep fled from her eyelids and she longed for the coming of the morning, for she had determined, as soon as it was day, to return alone to the spot where she had seen the youth, and if possible to ascertain his origin.

* * *

On this night the lions had broken into the sheepfolds and caused great devastation. When the shepherds awoke and discovered that ravenous thieves had stolen into their flocks, they girded on their swords, took their spears in their hands, held their bows in readiness and concealed themselves in the deep thickets of the woods.

Thamar knew nothing of this night's horrors. She arose with the morning light and went, with-

out her companion, to the spot where she had spoken to the youth. There she heard the shouting of the shepherds in the distance. They had just espied a fierce lion who had already strangled many sheep and cattle. Thamar knew not what the noise meant, hence paid no attention to it. She went forward, wrapt in thought, and plucking flowers with which she made a fragrant wreath. When she approached the brook she saw Amnon standing on the opposite side watering his flocks. Her heart beat violently. The shepherd also became confused. Like two doves who bow their heads to drink, their images were reflected in the clear stream. They gazed at their shadows, but dared not look each other in the face. Finally, Thamar took courage, and smiling sweetly, said:

"I have come to discharge my debt," at the same time holding out a wreath of flowers; but he answered:

"See, my lady, a stream flows between thee and me and my hand is too short to receive thy gift."

"If thy hand be too short, mine, on the contrary, is strong and skillful," said Thamar, and she threw the wreath across the brook to Amnon. In a moment, Amnon, with a voice full of anguish, shouted:

"Save thyself, my lady, save thyself!"

Thamar turned and instantly became motionless from fright, for from the woods there issued a fierce lion awful to behold. With mane floating in the wind, with tail outstretched, he rushed nearer and nearer. His fiery eyes rolled, his jaws were like an open grave, his red tongue thirsted

for blood. He came rushing upon Amnon's herd, which he had spied from the opposite side of the brook. He crouched down and was already about to spring, when Amnon, quick as lightning, bent his bow, shot, and in a trice the lion, roaring loudly, fell, for Amnon's arrow had pierced his heart. Not ten yards distant from Thamar, who had become insensible, he fell dead on the bank.

Amnon, who had not trembled before the lion, became frightened at the sight of the fainting maiden. He left his herd, rushed through the stream, and stood irresolute before Thamar. He cried to her with a loud voice and his tears fell on her cheeks. Then he shook her until she revived. She opened her eyes, saw the fallen lion and heard Amnon's words as he spoke gently to her: "Calm thyself, thou nobleman's daughter. Fear not. See, the danger is over and the terror of death is past. The Lord God strengthened the arm of thy servant, that his arrow reached the heart of the fierce lion, and now thou art saved. Look upon him as he lies there bleeding, and be of good cheer."

Thamar's heart was still fearful and her mind was overwhelmed with joy and terror. She looked with tearful eyes, first up to heaven and then at the friend who had saved her life. Her soul overflowed with thankfulness, yet her lips remained silent. Amnon continually endeavored to inspire her with courage until she again came to herself. At last she spoke:

"Oh! God, thou who workest wonders, what man can remain steadfast when in a moment he

sees life and death so near each other? I, a weak maiden, have seen them meeting and how shall I recover myself? The storm in my soul seeks for rest. There he lies before me, the frightful lion. His fangs are like sharp swords and his eyes, even in death, stare at me as if he would rend my heart and devour my limbs," and clasping Amnon's hand, she continued, "Only thy courage, oh youth! and thy powerful right arm saved me from the devouring beast. Thou wast my defender in the greatest peril and as an angel of mercy thou didst hasten to my relief. Thou hast done such great things for me that no thanks will ever be able to pay my debt."

Amnon modestly answered:

"The help came alone from God. He guided my hand to slay the beast of prey. Therefore, arise and thank the Lord, thy deliverer."

Thamar asked the shepherd his name. "They call me Amnon," he replied.

"I will also henceforth call thee Amnon," said Thamar. "I pray thee, Amnon, my life-saver, take these bracelets in remembrance of this hour. I do not offer them to thee as a reward for thy deed, but only that therewith my name may remain in thy memory, that thou mayest not forget me. Thy reward rests with my father. He will open his hand generously and promote thee, because a brave youth like thee should not tarry with shepherds, nor hide himself among the low-born. The wild beasts of the forest should no longer disturb thy slumbers, nor the trees of the woods listen to thy charming speech. Jedidjah, my father, is a prince in Judea. He has great

possessions and far-reaching power. He is in a position to raise thee from poverty."

"Oh princess, urge me not to take this present from thine hand. See, I am only a poor shepherd and if I think of thee I should forget the world and the fullness thereof," Amnon replied, with tears flowing down his cheeks.

Then Thamar said:

"The tears which hang like pearls on thine eyelashes are tokens to me that thou wilt not forget me, as I unto this day have never forgotten thee."

"When hast thou ever before seen me?" asked Amnon in amazement.

She laughingly made answer:

"In dreams, which God has this day brought to pass, so that I might while awake behold thee."

But Amnon said:

"Forgive me, my lady, thou speakest to me in riddles, and I can not understand thee."

Thamar continued in a friendly tone:

"When thou dost go up to the Feast at Jerusalem come to my father's house. Then thou wilt understand this riddle and find an opportunity to gain distinction, either among the great warriors, or among the sons of the prophets who are supported from my father's bounty. I charge thee by the roes and hinds of the fields to regard my petition, thereby thou wilt gain advantage to thyself. Meanwhile, abide here in peace and God be with thee. Think sometimes of Thamar, who also will think of thee, with ardent affection, and to eternity will never forget Amnon."

Maacah came to seek her mistress. When she saw the dead lion she shrieked loudly. Then Thamar told her how the shepherd had rescued her, but the latter said:

"See, thou art to blame for this, because thou didst thoughtlessly pursue thy way."

Thamar charged Maacah not to disclose this nor anything else to her father, except the fact that the youth saved her life. Maacah who had herself gone out to seek him, whom Thamar had found, for she had been devoted to Amnon since she first saw him, rejoiced when she knew that her mistress had invited him to come to Jedidjah's house to dwell with them under the same roof.

Thamar and Maacah now went on their way to Abisai's house. Thamar, from time to time, turned and looked back upon Amnon. He was busily skinning the lion for he wished to use the skin as a covering for his mule.

* * *

One day, when Uz visited the herds, he found Amnon sunk in deep thought. He was seated on a stone holding in his hand a shriveled white rose, which he thus addressed:

"Thou tender little rose, how beautiful thou didst become after the morning awoke thee and filled thy cup with the dew of heaven! Tall trees then looked upon thee with envy. Thou didst bloom and brighten and become more lovely until noon-day. Then the parching heat withered thee. The dew dried and thy countenance paled. Thou art spoiled and withered, thou poor little

flower. Verily, verily, the grass of the field and the flowers of the meadow are our teachers. The sky is spread open before us like an endless book and the earth with all that lives and moves thereon is as a scroll, which the Lord God himself has filled with wonderful writing. The Lord says to man, 'Read in this great book and learn therefrom all thy life long, then thou wilt act wisely and intelligently.' Like the rose, man grows and blooms in the morning dew of his youth, until love with her joy and pain awakens him and destroys his innocence. Her fiery beams wither his heart like the grass, for his soul cannot find that which it seeks."

"What ails thee, Amnon?" asked Uz. "For some time I have observed thee with amazement. Thine appearance is altered. Thy behavior is incomprehensible to me and all thy words and deeds are unintelligible. Thou seekest the most secluded spot in the woods and tarriest there like a hermit-crow and thou dost wander like a deer from brook to spring. From the hour when the sun rises until the weary day declines, thou art running from mountain to mountain and from valley to valley not knowing what thou seekest. One can hardly trust thee with thy flocks. See! thy lambs are scattered. They seek their food here and there and thou observest it not, because thou art absent-minded. Thou pursuest all sorts of visions and thy mouth speaks riddles."

Amnon answered:

"Listen, Uz, and thou shalt hear incredible things. Thou knowest Thamar. Of her my heart never dared to think. See, I have rescued

her from a fierce lion which followed our shepherds. His carcass lies hidden in the woods yonder. Thamar has kindly urged me to come to Jerusalem and there dwell under the shelter of her father's roof. For this reason I am so perplexed, when I think of the honor which Thamar would allot me in her father's house."

Uz was astonished at hearing these words and said:

"Hast thou performed this and hast not told it to any man? I pity thee, Amnon, for such thoughts as thou art cherishing appear charming as the doves, whose wings glitter with green and gold, but who quarrel in the market like the ravens of the valley. Wilt thou ascend higher than the eagle who flies to the sun, or wilt thou outrun the hinds on the mountains? Drive these visions from thy mind, then thou wilt forget thy sorrow and disquiet."

Uz related all that had happened to Abisai. He was alarmed and sent Amnon to Bozrah to buy sheep. Jedidjah, not long after, invited Amnon to visit him, but his messenger was told that Amnon tarried in Bozrah.

CHAPTER V

The Harvest

THEMAN, in accordance with his father's command, went to Mt. Carmel, where Sithri was delighted to see him. One day they arose very early and walked through the vineyards and gardens. The morning sun, with its resplendent rays, gilded Mt. Carmel. The vineyards resounded with joy and pleasure as the vine-dressers sang their sweet melodies.

Theman, with his three servants, entered the nearest vineyards. He said to the workmen:

"Ye laborers in the vineyards, listen to my words. Every branch on the vines which I bind with a rush ye shall leave untouched, for it is holy, and the fruits which grow thereon ye shall also leave, for they are the first fruits, the portions of the priests. Behold the vines in the valley, whose branches spread over the mountains and are laden with an abundance of blessings! The vines bend under the weight of the fruit. These grapes are full of ruby-tinted wine. Yonder I see figs and pomegranates peeping out among the dark foliage. They seem to invite me to pluck them and carry them as gifts to the Sanctuary. These are rightly called the 'firstlings,' and their wine should be placed before the Lord. Behold

that olive tree, spreading abroad its branches, laden with ripe fruit, dropping fatness! Its oil also shall be the Lord's, and shall be poured out in the sanctuary, as God has poured out his blessings upon our land."

Theman thus addressed the vine-dressers:

"Ye shall not keep the gleanings, but what remains shall be for the strangers, the widows and the orphans. Eat as many grapes as you desire, but do not forbid those sad-hearted ones, who have come hither to forget their poverty and misery. Give to the thirsty; drive them not away. Reproach them not, for who knows what the future may bring us? Perhaps it may come to pass that our sons and daughters may be hungry and thirsty, and seek nourishment and refreshment in the stranger's fields and vineyards. Therefore, leave the gleanings for the poor, for that is the toll which we pay to God, who has blessed the labor of our hands."

The vine-dressers were all active. They sang and shouted over their work. Young men and maidens emptied their baskets into the tubs which the porters carried to the wine-press. Two men stood by the press talking together. The first said:

"The wine is clear as the dew of heaven, wherein the morning light is reflected."

The second answered:

"Therefore shall this wine be brought unto the house of God, because it is full of the sweetness of the sun in the heavens."

And the wine-treaders, who trod out the grapes, shouted:

"Heigho! Heigho! Doth not wine rejoice both God and man? It is poured upon the altar, as a sweet-smelling offering to the Lord. To the aged who drink it, it will bring back joy and youth."

The noon-day hour came on. The hands of the wine-dressers were weary. They stretched themselves in the shady corners of the vineyards, and mingled their talk with playful, harmless jests. Here a boy climbed up a date palm and had almost clasped the top with his hands, when he slipped down to the ground, amid the laughter of his companions. Yonder a little girl ran after a boy, who had given her a sound box on the ear. Another swung a branch with hanging grapes in her hand, and, when near enough to the boy, she struck him in the face with it until it became red. Finally, amid general laughter, he begged for grace. Thus they amused themselves until the noon-day meal.

Theman strolled about the vineyards and lo, hidden away among the vine branches, was a lone maiden, gathering gleanings, heeding not the noise and merriment of the young people. From time to time a tear fell upon her cheek, but her tears were like the zephyr which plays over the roses of Sharon, and only added to her beauty and sweetness. The tears were succeeded by an earnest look from her dove-like eyes, which, like a sunbeam, shed a serene light over her sad countenance.

Theman was astonished at the singular beauty of this maiden, a beauty such as he had never before beheld. He stood rooted to the spot un-

able to withdraw his gaze. He sighed and said to himself:

"Alas! that such a one should be allotted to a poor man, for verily a son of need will lead her home. Oh, God! thou hast given me honor and riches. A nobleman's daughter has been allotted to me. Oh take all this from me and bestow it upon another! Give the honor to the nobles and counsel to kings and the wealth to the charitable. The prince's daughter rejoices in silk, purple and costly apparel. Give me this maiden, and I will not exchange her for the king's daughter in all her glory. Grant me on thy great earth, only a small piece of ground, a little vineyard. Give me a humble cottage, wherein I can dwell alone with this one, and I shall be happy."

As he stood lost in thought, and was about to ask the maiden her family and name, a lad came to invite him to return to the laborers in the vineyard, who were unwilling to eat their dinner until he had blessed the bread and wine, for Sithri was not in the vineyard.

Theman went to perform this service, but when he returned after a short time, the maiden had disappeared. He searched throughout the garden in vain. He continued this search for several days, but could nowhere discover her. He became very uneasy and was troubled for three days.

Theman went on the fourth day, with two servants, to hunt on Mt. Carmel. A stately deer came stalking out of the woods. He went majestically along with uplifted head, and, kinglike, he bore his horns as a crown. No sooner did

he perceive Theman, than he fled by a steep and rough path to escape. Instead of coming into the open space, he plunged deeper and deeper into the forest. Theman ordered his servant to pursue the beast into the thicket, but he himself slowly followed, until straying from the right path he lost his way. He cried aloud to his companions, but received no answer. Silence reigned around him. He wandered about for a long time, not knowing which way to take. At last he saw in the distance, something white fluttering in the breeze. He hastened thither, and lo, the maiden whom he had seen in the vineyard! She beamed from the darkness of the woods like the rosy light of the morning. She came from her cottage which stood in a chasm of the rock. When she perceived Theman, she trembled and darted back, but he reassured her:

"Fear not, thou lovely one. I will only entreat thee for one thing. God has let me unexpectedly find thee. Therefore restore to me that which thou hast taken from me."

"What have I taken from thee, my lord?" she tearfully asked. "Far be it from thy servant to take anything which does not belong to her. I was for four days in your vineyard, yet I took naught from the full branches, save only the gleanings, for see, my lord, the gleanings of the field and the vineyard are the only nourishment of thy servant and her mother."

Theman asked:

"Who is thy mother, and to which tribe and thousand doth thy father belong?"

"My father is dead. I have never known him, but my mother knows his tribe and thousand."

When Theman asked where she and her mother dwelt, if it was in the hut in the rocks, she added:

"My mother has gone away and will not return for three days. Yet tell me, my lord, why hast thou put me in such misery and unrest by desiring me to return to thee that which I have never taken from thee?"

"Thou hast robbed me of much, thou who art lovely as a hind and graceful as a roe. Give sleep to my eyes and rest again to my heart, for they have departed from me since I have seen thee," was Theman's reply.

The maiden blushed and became greatly embarrassed, but she did not venture to contradict him.

However, she asked:

"Sir, what hast thou found in thy maiden?"

"The whole world and the glory thereof," cried Theman, and immediately took a ring from his hand and passed it to her, saying:

"Tell me thy name."

"I am here called Susanna," was her reply.

"Thy name is well suited to thee," said Theman. "Therefore know thou, thou tender rose, as this sapphire is enclosed in the gold of this ring, so also shall dwell thy lovely image in my heart forever and ever. Two ways are open before me. I must either raise thee up to me, and thou shalt dwell in a splendid palace, with

rich apartments, at my side, or I shall descend to thee and dwell in this cottage."

The maiden gazed at Theman in astonishment and said:

"How good thou art, my lord, and how great is thy favor. See, I dwell here with my mother, and the place is already too small for us; why shouldst thou leave thy lordly place to live here, where no man dwells? Nevertheless, return here in three days. Then my mother will answer thee. I have no voice in the matter."

Theman could no longer restrain himself. He kissed her, saying:

"Thou art right, my love. I will speak with thy mother. Now show me the way to Sithri's house."

Susanna showed him a forsaken path, which he followed to Sithri's house, where he waited impatiently for the third day.

On the morrow Sithri collected the first fruits and brought them to Theman to carry to Jerusalem. They also took the choicest of the fruit, placed it in gold and silver baskets, as was their custom, and hung young pigeons and turtle doves around them. They loaded two mules with the gifts and early in the morning started on their way. The chosen ox walked at the head of the company. His horns were gilded and his head was crowned with a wreath of olive leaves, to show that he was the king of the domestic animals. "For where no oxen are the crib is empty, but much increase is by the strength of the ox." The ox patiently bears his master's yoke, while he goes through the field and plows

it, yet he has scarcely finished this hard task, before he must bid farewell to the valleys and carry much fruit for men to eat. He can not even satisfy himself with that which he has helped to produce, for he travels the holy way to Jerusalem, there to end his life. By his death he gives cheer alike to God and man. To God he gives his fat and blood as a thank-offering; to his master he gives his flesh as savory food.

When they had gone some distance on their journey Theman called to his servants:

"Go slowly on your way. I will return to Carmel, where I have a matter to settle. I will overtake you towards evening."

He mounted his swiftest mule and rode like one borne on a swift wind to Susanna's cottage. When he reached it he could not find what he sought.

He was met by a strange old woman, who gave him the sapphire from his ring, saying:

"The Philistine woman who dwells here, in respect to her daughter, Susanna, said: 'The sapphire has been broken from the ring, and no earthly power can restore it again.'"

Theman clasped his hands. "Where have the two women gone? Reveal it, and I will give thee whatever thou requirest," he cried.

The old woman answered:

"I know as little as thyself whither they are gone, and can only deliver to thee the message which the Philistine woman left in my charge. Still, she further told me she never more expected to return here."

Theman, with a sad heart, turned back to overtake his servants. He arrived at Jerusalem in safety, and Jedidjah presented the first fruits in the Temple, according to the custom and commandment, but Theman remained sad and miserable. He concealed the cause of his sorrow from his parents.

CHAPTER VI

The Shepherd in the Palace

"By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth. I sought him, but I found him not."—Solomon's Song, iii, 1.

AUTUMN had come, and on the fourteenth day of the seventh month Thamar stood at the window of her room, which looked upon the East street, and distributed alms, for on the evening before the Feast she gave money to the converted Gentiles, the poor, the widows and orphans, that they might enjoy the holiday. She also sent many to her father's garners and cellars where Theman and Zimri distributed grain, wine and oil.

Thirza, with one of her house servants, entered. She bore five changes of raiment which she had prepared for the shepherd, Amnon, the rescuer of her daughter.

She showed them to Thamar, saying:

"Thou sayest, my daughter, that the youth of Bethlehem is alike in size with this lad. I have had these garments fitted upon him, so keep them with thee, until the youth comes. Then they shall belong to him."

Thamar asked:

"Mother, is not my life worth more to thee than these garments?"

Thirza laughed.

"Why dost thou ask this, my child? They will delight the shepherd, who is not accustomed to splendid attire."

She then ordered the servants to carry thirty upper garments to the sons of the prophets, whom she had invited to dinner the next day.

Thamar placed the garments which had been allotted to her friend in a chest, and returned to her work of righteousness, which she continued until the evening meal.

Azrikam came to her then and said:

"Alms are not intended to be given out by tender hands, yet thou art not content with the gifts to the poor, but hast also spoken kind words to the poor and despised."

"Knowest thou then, Azrikam, what has driven these people into poverty and shame, that thou also scornest them?" she asked indignantly. "Knowest thou of a truth, that they have committed mischief, injustice or violence? No! then they may have fallen into poverty through their simplicity and ignorance. Whoever closes his ears against them must have a heart of stone, which their tears can not soften."

"Oh, indeed!" cried Azrikam. "These people love the bread of idleness, therefore they are poor. He who works not should not eat. For this reason I have directed my steward, Achan, to give them what they need, and also seven strokes for their indolence. This has worked well.

It has strengthened their hands for labor, and many have ceased to knock at my door."

"That I can readily believe," replied Thamar. "Many have ceased to knock at thy door, because thy house is to them like a dragon's den. Still if these unfortunates dared to open their mouths and speak openly to thee, thus could they question thee: 'Tell us, Azrikam, in what respect art thou better than we are that thou dost consider us idle and negligent? Tell us, thou man of many occupations, thy sheep and pastures, and the riches which God hath given thee, do they not exist to pamper thy body? To sit at a well-filled table with thy hand at thy mouth, and thy teeth moving between thy lips, this is thy business. Impose on us a similar burden and we will joyfully perform it, our teeth shall bite and our jaws chew with pleasure.' "

"Oh! Thamar! why wilt thou set thyself up as the protector of those who lie in the dust, and how darest thou thus to speak to a prince of Judea, the lord of thy youth," he said with displeasure.

"Pardon me, Azrikam, still why didst thou hasten to my father's house before the holidays, only to begin a quarrel with me?"

"I was weary and lonesome at home, so I came here to see if thine eye had a friendly look, or thy mouth a kind word for me, and I am disappointed, for what I expected I have neither seen nor heard. Thou knowest thou art not homely, and thou reliest upon thy beauty to prevent my resenting thy forwardness." Thereupon he sought to embrace her, and continued, "I am

angry with God for bestowing grace and beauty upon thee, for otherwise I would speak to thee differently."

Thamar, with loathing, endeavored to free herself from his arms, and cried angrily:

"Enough of this mockery! Depart from me! I also am angry with God who has given me grace and beauty, because therewith have I found grace in thy sight."

Still Azrikam did not yield, but implored her:

"Tell me, beloved of my soul, how can I win thy favor?"

Thamar answered:

"By hating me."

Then Azrikam's courage failed him. "Oh! that my mind was firm and my heart hard enough to break the bond of my love for thee, then my fetters would fall."

Thamar replied:

"Thou art only fettered by what thine eyes behold, and if thou hadst respected what thine ears heard, thy fetters would long since have melted in the fire of thine anger."

Azrikam again retorted:

"Oh, no! I can not be angry with thee, for thy beauty which ravishes mine eyes appeases mine anger. Could I but free myself from thy charms, I would return unto thine own bosom all the abuse and invectives which thou hast hurled against me. Yet on account of thine imperious will, this will I do—I will choose another wife. My will shall govern thee, and my wish

be thy wages, until thou hast learned from them how to value a prince of Judea."

Thamar with a sigh said:

"I long since knew thy ways, yet to-day thou hast vouchsafed me the favor to teach me the manners of the woman whom thou wilt take to thyself that I may be wise enough to know the value of a prince of Judea. Still all this is in the distant future. If I have indeed found grace in thine eyes, I beseech thee, thou prince in Judea, to depart from me, for thy words only burden me, and my soul longs for rest."

"Ever since I knew thee thou hast always been opposed to me, yet, for the last five months since thine escape from the lions, the great fright which befell thee has roused a disturbing spirit in thee, and thou art as stubborn as the wild ass of the wilderness."

"Leave me, I will dwell alone like the wild beast," said Thamar, rising up.

Azrikam went angrily away. After he had gone she burst into tears.

"How long shall this monster torment me? Oh, God! thou who bringest the night to an end, make also an end to the love with which Azrikam loves me."

Thamar remained in her room and sat at the window gazing out sadly upon the East street. The setting sun gilded the Tower of David until it gleamed like fire, and from the suspended shields and trophies of war glanced beams of light. Multitudes thronged the streets of Zion. Many strangers were present from other cities. They had come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles

at Jerusalem. It was a holiday, and the citizens had left their business and remained at home with their wives and children to have a merry time on the evening before the Feast. Thamar was sad. She gazed upon the bright spectacle which presented itself before her eyes, yet she silently longed after the image which she had so long borne in her heart.

The door turned on its hinges, yet she heard it not. Maacah entered, but she paid no attention to her. Maacah spoke and said:

"My mistress, why art thou so uneasy and depressed when every countenance beams with joy? Thy thoughts tarry in the distance."

"No," answered her mistress, "they tarry between heaven and earth—between Amnon and Azrikam. Here I stand in my watch-tower, and look longingly out for Amnon to come to my father's house as he promised me at Bethlehem. I see a multitude in the streets who have flocked here from distant cities, and thousands of pilgrims who have come up to God's House, yet I find no trace of Amnon. Oh, that no evil hath befallen him! I learned from a wayfarer that he left Bozrah ten days ago, and started homeward. Perhaps some accident hath happened to him on the journey, for he brought herds with him from Bozrah. My soul hovers over an abyss of countless thoughts, which move to and fro whenever I think of him. For this reason I am uneasy and melancholy."

The day ended and evening came when the Feast of Tabernacles began. Men left their dwellings and ate in the booths. One cried to

another, "Mikra Kodesh!" "Holy convocation" (the Feast greeting). Groups of noblemen met in the street, and greeted each other with happy faces. Great multitudes assembled themselves to drink cider and wine. Everywhere there was joy and song and the City of God exulted and was merry.

Thamar alone grieved because Amnon had not appeared, and her longing desire was fixed upon him. She went sadly to her couch to pass a sleepless night.

The young day awoke. The sunbeams gleamed through Thamar's windows and played on the folds of the purple hangings with which the bed was surrounded, lest the morning sun should too early awaken the fair sleeper. Darkness still rested upon her couch, and lovely morning-dreams played about and fanned her with their soft wings; for toward day-break her troubles and torment like frightened night-birds flew away and were forgotten, and pleasant dreams floated lovingly past her which her heart caught one after another in their flight.

She awoke with Amnon's name on her lips for she had dreamed of her friend. Now she was sorrowful, because awake she could no longer refresh herself with his image.

Maacah stepped softly to her couch and said:

"Arouse thyself! Make thyself ready, my mistress, for to-day is God's holyday. Put on thine attire and let us go and gaze upon the beauty of the Lord, and the joy of his people on

his Holy Hill. See, they have already led the cattle out of the stable, and the sheep out of the fold, for peace-offerings and whole-offerings."

With these words she drew back the curtains. The sunbeams illuminated Thamar's countenance and she exclaimed:

"How lovely is the sun; his beams are like the light which shone on Amnon's face as I saw him in my dreams. Would that to-day I might see him while awake!"

Maacah laughed.

"Seven-fold light beams upon thee, my mistress, while awake, but night visions are false and dreams senseless."

Thamar arose, dressed and put on her ornaments, and then went with Maacah up to the mountain of the House of the Lord, there to present themselves before the Lord of Hosts.

From every direction crowds were pressing towards the Holy Hill leading sheep and cattle for offerings. The two women crossed over the bridge which leads from Mt. Zion to Mt. Moriah, which Solomon built to connect his palace with God's Temple. When Thamar saw the multitude she sang and praised the Lord God, and said:

"Amnon, my chosen, is more to me than all these thousands. Oh! that I might find him among this throng! Yet why do I hope? Were he in Zion he would not delay in coming to my father's house, for he promised me, and he would not break his word."

As they went up the Hill of God, she knelt down and prayed:

"O God, thou who sendest help from thy Sanctuary, protect Amnon with thy rich grace. Grant that no harm may befall him where he tarries. He hath not kept his word, for he promised to come hither and assured me he would not forget. Still I am not angry with him, Oh Lord, because he certainly has not remained away from treachery or evil design. O thou Eternal One, who knowest his going out and coming in, his rising up and lying down, crown him with thy grace, and be to him a shield and fortress."

Thamar arose, walked about the Holy Hill with Maacah and then returned home.

After she had taken some refreshments, pomegranate wine and sweet pastry, she asked Thirza's permission to stroll through the city streets until noon. Thirza willingly granted it, with the caution not to remain away too long, and asked:

"What means it, my daughter, that the youth of Bethlehem has not arrived?"

Thamar answered:

"I know not what to think of it, for he appeared to me in no wise insincere when he made the promise."

Then with her maid she walked through the streets of Jerusalem. They examined everywhere thoroughly and searched in every corner, forgetting time and space until Maacah urged their return, as the shadow on King Ahaz's dial showed the hour of noon. Thamar sighed:

"Yes, let us go home, I have not yet found what I sought."

While she was thus vainly searching, Amnon had already arrived at Jerusalem. He asked for Jedidjah's house, found it and entered. Jedidjah met him and inquired:

"Who art thou, youth?"

"I am a shepherd," he anwered, "belonging to thy steward, Abisai, and thy daughter urged me to come here when I came up to present myself before the Lord. I am here in obedience to her command."

Jedidjah looked upon him.

"Art thou called Amnon?"

"Yes, my lord, Amnon is the name of thy servant."

"Art thou he who rescued my daughter from the fierce lion?"

Amnon modestly said:

"God granted skill and power to the arms of thy servant to accomplish the deed."

"God, the Lord, give you favor among men, and mayest thou become a man of reputation in Zion. Thy deed remains with me. I shall reward thee according to thy merits." So saying Jedidjah presented him to his wife and his son Theman: "This is Amnon, the shepherd, who saved our Thamar."

Thirza rejoiced at meeting him and said:

"God bless thee, thou dear youth, who saved my daughter from such great peril; for had thy hand been weak, or thy step slow, my daughter's name would have been lost from the earth. Therefore we will keep a double Feast to-day, but thy deed shall not be unrewarded."

"I have had my reward, my deed was due alone to God, the Lord," was the youth's reverent reply.

Then Thirza said:

"Go, Amnon, take off thy shepherd's dress and attire thyself in the holyday garments which I made ready for thee yesterday, for from this time thou shalt belong in our house, and thou shalt no longer be called a shepherd." Then she ordered a bath to be prepared for him.

The servant brought him into the bath-room, and then, after having anointed him with sweet-smelling oil, led him radiant with beauty into the sitting-room, where Jedidjah said to him:

"Remain here for a little while until we return to seat ourselves at the table." He then left the room.

Then Theman, who had loved Amnon from their first meeting, took him into his sister's room.

"Thamar will soon return. She will scarcely know her rescuer, for the new garments have changed you greatly. They fit perfectly." Thus he spoke, and he rejoiced over him, and could not keep his eyes from him.

While they were talking together Thamar entered, leaning on her mother's arm and Maacah followed. When she spied Amnon in his new array, she blushed and her heart beat loudly for happiness, yet she sought to conceal her joy from the gaze of the lookers-on, and simply said:

"How happy I am to see the saver of my life under the shelter of my father's roof."

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Amnon stood before her not knowing what to say, though his heart overflowed with joy. She continued:

"Now thou hast come to redeem thy word, and thy heart has proved itself faithful. Behold! thou hast done good unto those who forget not good deeds."

Thirza added:

"Much good is reserved for those who do good; therefore thou shalt no more wander on the steep places where the sheep feed, but shalt dwell among the nobles on the high places of mankind."

Theman, who was not weary of admiring Amnon's noble figure, whispered in his mother's ear:

"Look, he has the figure and appearance of the youth whom Hananel saw in dreams, not a single sign is wanting."

But his mother answered:

"Go away with thy tales."

Thamar desired to know what Theman had whispered to her mother, but Thirza told her, "It was foolishness." She could not however mistake the signs, yet she kept her observations to herself.

Thamar's room was ornamented with cedar, and painted in beautiful colors. Her windows opened on one side upon East street, and on the other upon a lovely garden where fragrant shrubs as nard, saffron, calamus, cinnamon, and all sorts of sweet herbs grew. They sent their fragrance into the room and filled it with the perfume of myrrh, cloves, and all the choicest spices.

At this moment before the window which looked out upon East street, there appeared a man beating the air and shouting lustily. Theman went to the window to see what was going on. He saw there an old man tottering and staggering about. Want was written on his face.

"What is thy name," inquired Theman, "and whither hast thou come? Perchance thou art a descendant of the giants, the dwellers at Kirjath-Arbah, now called Hebron, and hast drunken wine like one of them."

"From Hebron," was the answer.

"Ah! so! from Hebron," Theman laughingly replied. "Thou hast done well on the journey, for one who before times stayed at home. Thou hast drunken wine like a giant, yet thou art no traveler so it has overcome thee, and thy drunkenness hath brought thee to shame."

The wanderer still went on:

"Wine is good for troubled souls, yet I do not owe my intoxication to the children of Zion."

Curious to see him, Thirza now went to the window and spoke to the drunken man:

"Why standest thou in the street screaming and shouting? Come in, if thou hast anything to say."

"Do not pay attention to the fact that I am drunk and totter to and fro, for the light of my eyes is still with me, and in the shelter of thine house I see my benefactor. Behold, thy servant traveled from Hebron up to God's House in Zion. On the way I was attacked by robbers, who took away my sheep and cattle with all the gifts which they bore, for I wished to bring them, as God had

blessed me during the year. When I saw that I could not resist the robbers, I prayed only for my life and let them take all I carried, and wished them to the devil. As a swarm of locusts on a fertile field, so had these robbers eaten me bare, and left me like an empty vessel standing on the way. Now tell me, my lady, can a man go before the Lord with empty hands, or come to Jerusalem with an empty stomach?

"Yesterday I reached the gates of Zion. The city was filled with happy, exulting people, yet my stomach remained empty. Oh, this is a shame for Zion! Who can endure the unspeakable torture of hunger? I besought princes and noblemen to appease my hunger and cover my nakedness, yet no one regarded me, for they esteemed a man according to his apparel, and they desired proofs from me. What shall a hungry man give for proofs? Can he show them his empty stomach? I cried after each of them: 'May the Creator have no mercy on thee, as thou hast had no pity upon me,' and went angrily on my way. Then this youth, with his bright, beautiful eyes noticed me, and in a hand's turn my limbs and my stomach blessed him, for he gave me a garment for my nakedness, and bread, wine and meat for the holyday.

"He had scarcely bestowed these gifts upon me ere he vanished from me, to my great regret. I reflected so much upon his good deed that I had no sleep the whole night. Then I resolved to go out early in the morning to seek for him in the streets and lanes, and to ask everybody for him. No sooner said than done. From early

morn I searched the whole city. When I went up to the Temple, lo! there I saw him and drew near to him; I was not mistaken, it was he. My soul overflowed with blessings and thankfulness towards him, but when I would have thanked him for all the favors which he had bestowed upon me, he pretended not to know me. Then I embraced him, but he mockingly laughed at me, saying: 'Depart from me, I am not he whom thou seekest.'

"His words perplexed me, still I never lost sight of him, but followed his footsteps until he entered thy house. Now judge, my lady, between this youth and me, for I will not leave here until he has received my benediction."

Thirza looked approvingly at Amnon, and said:

"Come here, thou kind-hearted youth, and receive this man's blessing," but Amnon went to the window and said:

"Thou strange man! How long wilt thou be drunk? Let the wine go from thee, for thou art altogether mistaken in him who has received thy thanks."

The man replied:

"I swear to thee that thou didst bestow the kindness upon me."

"The man is right," said Thirza, Theman and Thamar in one breath. Amnon stood perplexed and told the stranger:

"Come to me to-morrow morning. I dwell by the fish-gate, in the house of Imna the Carmelite."

The man replied:

"Thy wish is sacred to me, but I swear to thee by the God who dwelleth in Zion, that in the same measure with which thou hast sought to conceal thy kindness, I will disclose it, and I will proclaim thy goodness in the gates. If this be a shame to thee, may God bless all the princes of Judea with such children, then would David's city never be moved."

The man then turned to go away.

Thirza and Thamar were surprised at hearing of Amnon's benevolence, which displayed his kind disposition. Theman embraced him and said:

"Thy deed appears wonderful to me, Amnon. My soul loves thee, and I shall regard thee as a brother."

While they were thus conversing, Azrikam entered and the drunkard, who had reached the next corner, came back to the window shouting:

"That is the prince's son who, when I asked him for alms yesterday, scorned me; rebuked me with hard words, mercilessly thrust me aside and would not assist me, although he is of high position. Verily such a hard-hearted fellow as he should not be allowed to enter the house of the 'Benefactor.' "

Azrikam loudly exclaimed:

"Who called such rabble to Jerusalem? Do we suffer for lack of drunkards? Go quickly away or I will deliver thee to the keepers of the peace, who will drive away thy drunkenness with rods, and teach thee how to speak to a prince in Judea."

But the drunkard cried yet louder:

"Aye, rods are prepared for the hard-hearted and they that wander from virtue; for our princes who load themselves with fat and fill their stomachs with good things, and are without human hearts."

Amnon stepped to the window.

"The foolishness of wine," he said, "speaks through thy lips, therefore, cease thy insolence and no longer abuse a prince."

The drunkard immediately responded:

"Verily thou hast a spirit of good will, wherefore chastise this prince's son with the rods of thy mouth, for he little resembles a prince in Judea, but is much like the great horned ox of Bashan."

However, when the drunkard, after these insulting words, saw that Azrikam was about to seize him, he mingled quickly with the people in the street and was soon lost in the crowd.

Theman, in a low tone, said to Amnon:

"Know thou, this youth is Azrikam, to whom my sister is betrothed. I trust he will reward thee well for the service thou hast rendered his bride."

Azrikam had already jealously noticed Theman's friendliness towards Amnon, and also the affectionate looks which Thamar bestowed upon him, and he said to Thirza:

"Who is this youth, and what is his city?"

Thirza answered:

"He is Amnon, the shepherd, who rescued thy beloved from the lions."

"So this is Amnon, the shepherd," replied

Azrikam, speaking the last word very emphatically.

"He was formerly a shepherd, and kept the sheep of Joram, thy father," answered Thirza.

"I rejoice," said Azrikam, "in the strength of his arm. Under his oversight my sheep are being well guarded; be assured, therefore, I will employ him, nor will I forget the service which he has rendered Thamar, but will make him an upper shepherd. But what seems remarkable to me is that he, a shepherd, is clothed like a nobleman. Has the pasturage of the shepherds become a weariness since he displayed his courage and presence of mind?"

Thamar then said:

"A man cannot alter his character and disposition, but every morning he can dress according to the place he occupies."

"Thou art right," replied Azrikam. "Since yesterday thou hast not changed thy evil disposition for a better. I asked thee why shepherds wear noblemen's clothing, and thou hast answered with something entirely different."

Thirza interrupted him, saying:

"Although Amnon is not a nobleman's son, yet God hath blessed him with very remarkable gifts far surpassing the usual measure of birth and descent, for the spirit of bravery and courage rests upon him. Thou oughtest, for the love which thou barest to Thamar, to be willing to esteem this youth who saved her life."

Azrikam turned and addressed Amnon:

"Abisai sent thee to Bozrah to buy sheep.

Now are the sheep which thou hast brought with thee from thence fat or lean?"

Amnon answered:

"They are very good, my lord, but we will not now talk of business, for to-day is a holy-day."

Azrikam replied:

"God will not reckon it against us as a sin if we take an offering to Him from the herd. But be thou, brave youth, a perfect man, and be not ashamed of thy labor, but perform it as a faithful servant. Even if thou art of humble origin, yet thou canst rejoice over the strength of thine arm and thy courage."

Thamar added:

"God looks upon the heart, still there are many short-sighted people who see only what their eyes behold. We inquire of every man: Who are his parents, how great is his wealth, and what is his business? And thereupon we estimate his worth."

Azrikam again spoke:

"I am also only a short-sighted man, and not God. Nevertheless, before thou openedst thy mouth, I had searched thine heart and found it was not upright. I perceived that thou soughtest to quarrel with me. Did I not say yesterday that another spirit rules thee, and I know not whence it came?"

When Thirza saw that hot words had begun to fall, she said:

"Ye men, go now into the booth and refresh yourselves with old wine, until my husband comes and we partake of the noon-day meal."

"I will eat nothing," said Azrikam, "until the priest has notified me that the fifty whole-offerings which I have brought to-day are wholly consumed, for how can a man care for his body before his offering has appeased God?"

Thereupon Theman inquired:

"Behold thou hast manifold whole-offerings wherewith to enrich God's altar, why didst thou not bring a peace-offering for distribution among the priests and the poor?"

"Oh!" said Thamar, "who shall concern themselves for the poor and despised that lie in the dust? He who does not work should not eat. Is it not better to give them seven strokes for their laziness, and thereby strengthen their arms so that they shall no more knock at our doors?"

"What art thou saying, my daughter?" asked Thirza in surprise. Amnon and Theman also wondered at her words.

Thamar answered:

"I swear by my life that these words came not from my heart, for this good teaching I learned yesterday from one of high position, who condescended to speak thus of the needy common people," and she fixed her eyes upon Azrikam, who blushed with shame before her words and looks.

While they stood gazing at each other in silence, a boy came running to tell Azrikam that confusion had arisen in his house, and on that account Achan, the steward, had sent him to call his master. Azrikam now hastened home, but Thirza detained the boy to question him. She

gave him some refreshments, and urged him to tell what had happened at Azrikam's house.

The boy, after looking carefully around to see if any one were listening, said:

"Here first have I observed that to-day is a holy-day, for in my master's house there is nothing to show it. Holy-day rejoicing is forbidden. Nothing but a piece of dry bread has passed my lips to-day. Behold! my master's servants wait impatiently for the day when thy daughter shall enter our house, for we all hope she will abolish these evil conditions."

But Thamar whispered in Theman's ear:

"That day will never dawn!"

Thirza urged him to tell her what was the unusual event which had recalled Azrikam home so suddenly. Then he told her:

"Thou knowest, my lady, that in Joram's time it was the custom of the house on every holy-day, to set a table for four hundred converted Gentiles, widows and orphans. Since Azrikam has grown up, he has abolished this custom, and accordingly ordered his steward before the holy-day began to distribute a very little from cellars and threshing-floor to the poor. But Achan, the villain, closed his hand and gave nothing. Yesterday when the poor came to receive the customary alms, he said to them: 'Come again at evening, then my master will open his granary.' But my master did not come home last evening. This morning, two men came before my master's house, called Achan out, and said: 'Whereas thy master has despised the wish of the poor, and thou also hast refrained thine hand from the

thirsty, so in the future a day will come when the houses of Azrikam and Achan will be cast off as an olive-tree sheds its dry leaves, and they will be spit out as trash.' After this speech a crowd of threatening figures surrounded my master's house, and called down terrible curses upon his dwelling. He can thank Achan for all this, for he is an arch villain whom he has placed over his house to cause the poor and the servants to suffer hunger."

When he had ended Thirza admonished him, saying:

"Disclose not the shame of thy master's house in the gates."

The boy answered:

"Such be far from me."

While they were talking Azrikam returned. When he saw the boy, he gnashed his teeth and looked so angry that the boy was afraid and ran quickly home. Azrikam turned to those present, and said:

"God hath blessed me with great riches, still he hath given me careless fellows, fools, and drunkards as servants. From the steward down to the youngest boy they all drink. Since the day of my majority, I have given the distribution of alms to my steward, Achan; could I then have foreseen that he, as yesterday, would drink too much wine, and therefore forget my command and let the poor go empty away? Now this curse has befallen me. Therefore, the servants of my house shall no longer be furnished with oil and wine. They shall be Nazarites, and fast to-day and always."

Thamar mockingly answered him:

"Thirty days do the Nazarites fast, but I believe that in thy household the fast days are not only thirty, but three times thirty, and that they never cease."

Azrikam cast an angry glance at Thamar but did not answer her remark, because just then Jedidjah, with Sithri from Carmel, and thirty sons of the prophets entered.

When Sithri perceived Amnon, he went to him, and said:

"Peace be with thee, thou lovely youth, my brother Abisai's pupil!"

Amnon answered:

"Peace be with thee, my lord!"

"Why has not Abisai been invited to eat with me?" inquired Jedidjah.

One of the lads answered:

"He will soon come," and at the same moment Theman, who was standing at the window, cried out that he saw him coming. Presently Abisai entered, and Jedidjah turned to him with the question:

"What shall be done for the youth who has saved my daughter's life?"

"I know his character," replied Abisai, "and that songs and proverbs flow from him like gold and wealth, for he utters sincere and elevating words, and sings songs to the praise of Zion in the shepherd's pastures."

Jedidjah turned to Amnon and said:

"Tell me thy wish. I am ready to grant it to thee."

Amnon answered:

"If I have found grace in thy sight, grant me a place among these," pointing to the sons of the prophets.

"Henceforth, thou shalt abide with me," said Jedidjah, "and shalt dwell in my house, and eat at my table." Then addressing the sons of the prophets, he continued, "If ye value my good will, take this lad lovingly among you and protect him with the hand of righteousness. Apply your mind to him, because he understands proverbs, parables and all God's wisdom."

The sons of the prophets, with one voice replied:

"If the youth wishes to come with us, and will endeavor to know God, then peace and virtue shall attend his ways, and he will become famous in the gates of Zion."

"The table is set outside in the booth which is in the garden," Jedidjah said, "so let us go thither to satisfy ourselves with God's gifts, and delight in instructive and agreeable conversation."

CHAPTER VII

The Feast of the Elect

EDIDJAH'S booth stood in a beautiful garden, under tall, shady trees whose branches met overhead. Circular flower beds surrounded it, in which grew flowers and various kinds of fragrant herbs. It was covered with palm branches. Here Jedidjah, with his family and his guests, sat at the table. They ate and drank and were of good cheer.

Thamar gazed from the open window of her room into the garden. She was clad in costly purple raiment. Dignity sat enthroned on her white brow, while graciousness was reflected from her smooth, rosy cheeks. Her eyes shone like the morning light. Her gaze fastened itself upon Amnon, unto whom her heart clave, and turned from Azrikam, the hated of her soul, who sat at Jedidjah's right hand; Theman sat next and then came Abisai, Sithri, and the sons of the prophets.

Jedidjah began the conversation:

"We sit here so pleasantly together in this peaceful dwelling and safe resting-place. May God ever keep us under the shelter of his grace, then shall we abide safely under the shadow of our own fig-tree, and shall not fear Sennacherib,

the King of Assyria, who has stretched out his hand to destroy kingdoms."

One of the sons of the prophets now spoke:

"If within us we keep the kingdom of peace and cherish the truth, we shall be safe from Sennacherib's power; but one feels sad to know that Sebna, the chamberlain, is in league with the enemy and is making a secret treaty with him, thus destroying the unity of God's City. He divides the people's heart, saying: 'We have no help from God, nor support from his anointed.' Behold, the Lord will reject him as a mightier one was rejected, and shall cover him up and roll him out of the land like a ball. As he has destroyed peace, peace shall desert his soul, as the Lord has spoken through Isaiah, his servant."

Here Sithri interrupted him:

"Why should we fear evil days? Has not the Lord promised peace to His people, and all godly men? Let us then rather join in a song of peace."

Jedidjah quickly assented:

"Amnon must sing us a song of Zion, for Abisai maintains that his singing is charming."

But Amnon said:

"I am too insignificant to open my mouth before the great ones of Zion, yet how can I, my lord, refuse any request of thine while I abide under the shadow of thy roof? So I will sing in praise of peace—

O God of Zion, peace above us spread!
Let thine hand cover our defenceless head
As when Thou savedst us from Mizraim.

Almighty One, reveal thy great salvation,
And show thy mercy to thy chosen nation,
From thy dread temple in Jerusalem.

When Thou didst frown on Ashur, Bel fell down;
When Thou didst smile on Zion for thine own,
Then were rejoicings made in hill and dell.
The throne of God is peace in heaven above;
Messiah's throne on earth is peace and love,
And peace shall be our lodge where we shall dwell.

O God of Zion! peace above us spread;
El Shaddai! cover our defenceless head;
Lead us,—protect us by thy mighty hand.
Make peace to blossom like the olive tree;
From enemies and troubles set us free,
And bless with constant peace our holy land.

The sons of the prophets, who perceived the sweetness of this song, were surprised at him and talked it over among themselves. One said:

"He would distinguish himself among the orators."

Another exclaimed:

"Oh! if he were of the house of Levi! he could let his sweet voice be heard in the house of the Lord."

Jedidjah exclaimed:

"Would he were a prince in Judea!"

But Thamar sighed softly:

"O that he were the prince of my youth!" She whispered this in the ear of her maid, Maacah, while her eyes rested on his noble figure.

Azrikam noticed that Thamar had not withdrawn her gaze from Amnon during the repast, and was fired with jealousy. But he concealed

the hostile purpose which he had formed against the shepherd, and said:

"Yes, such fine singers and orators are born in Zion every morning, but no one considers them remarkable because they dwell in the city of the king among nobles, upon whom the favor of God shines; in a city whose princes and nobles, whose priests and prophets, year in and year out, speak in sublime language. Still, the peasant and the shepherd, who all day long hear only the bleating of their flocks and watch over the wanderings of their beasts, know little of godly matters and their speech is rough. Wherefore, we must say of this youth, 'Behold! this is unusual.' "

Thereupon Sithri began:

"It well becomes a townsman to praise his home, and all that is therein, yet I, a dweller in the woods of Carmel, will now allow the shepherds and country-folks the right of argument. But, pardon me, my lords and companions, if I speak further. Azrikam has, while thus asserting that the country people know but little of the things of God, spoken words like threatening blows. Thereupon, I answer him. Honor and splendor certainly dwell in lordly temples and fine palaces. The knowledge of God rests in the dwellings of the upright, and the majesty of the Lord in His Sanctuary; yet true fear of God is found even in the villages, though far distant from the House of God, for God is near to the hearts and the mouths of the country people, and His righteousness is shown in the changing sea-

sons of the year—seed-time and harvest-time, in need and in plenty. When the heavens withhold rain and dew, then the husbandmen lift up their eyes and hope for the gracious and blessed showers, which the Lord will send to refresh the parched land. When heaven opens its gates and pours down its golden rain upon the earth, then the Lord blesses the land and it is a fruitful year. Then the hills overflow with honey, and the valleys drip fatness. Then, from far and near a song of praise and thanksgiving resounds, and harvest joy and autumn rejoicing fill all hearts. They gather their corn, and their wine. They satisfy themselves with the gifts of God and what remains over is for the poor.

"Go forth into the hamlets and villages and observe their inhabitants. They rise early, while yet the quiet night rests upon the earth. When the mist, which during the night has collected on the hills and mountains disappears, then the men go forth to their labors, while the virtuous women prepare flax and wool and provide clothing for all the household. When the sun gradually rises over the mountains, and the birds rejoice and sing, then the countryman turns his heart to the Almighty, for God is his rejoicing and his prayer ascends as sweet-smelling incense. Afterwards he returns, and when he enters his humble cottage, his faithful wife meets him with a smile while her eyes beam with love and graciousness. They awaken the children, they sit together, delighting themselves with God's gifts. They remain happily together until the sun is high in the heaven.

"At this time of the day, the son of Zion still lies outstretched on his couch turning and yawning. He has hardly put his feet out of bed before he begins to fret and scold. His slave tremblingly hastens to him, smears him with soap, washes him, anoints him with costly oil, and dresses him like an idol who has no hands wherewith to help himself. The slave brings him his under and upper garments, girdle and headcloth. He looks disdainfully upon them for he despises his people's attire, and would fain clothe himself in Egyptian linen which has been prepared on the banks of the Nile. Whoever is ashamed of the fashions of his people, his heart cleaves not to his fatherland. Oh! if I were a prince and judge in Judea I would forbid and put away the traffic of the Egyptians, Phœnicians and all our neighboring countries from our borders, for it renders our customs effeminate, and estranges us from our birthplace. Are there no weavers and embroiderers in Judea that we are forced to go to a strange land for material and clothing wherewith to cover our nakedness? Do not our sheep produce wool enough to keep our bodies warm?

"When the little lord is dressed, he strolls through the city; he goes from the Inner Gate to the Benjamin Gate, and from there to the Water Gate. If he falls in with some young people, they hasten to a wine shop where they drink until silly. Oh! go not into the noisy streets, for therein envy dwells,—envy, which seeks to set one man against another; there no one can protect himself against the sharp tongue of him who notices his neighbor's faults and slanders the vir-

tues and talents which he himself does not possess. There, the betrayer kisses with the mouth and bites with the teeth; there, revenge burns like hell and watches for blood wherewith to quench its fires.

"Love, too, which is so sweet and tender among the villagers, travels on evil ways in the cities. Do not riches and reputation often form an insurmountable barrier between two hearts which were created for each other? I have seen how grandeur and distinction have sold your lovely daughters to fellows who have naught save wealth and noble birth. Such unhappy women climb the mountains at night to utter their complaints to the moon. They wither like the roses in the winter's frost, for they have become the prey of those whom they detest. The city knows no rest, nor does the night bring sleep.

"Far different is the lot of the country people; luxury and weakness are unknown to them, evil and slanders are strangers there, and no maiden will exchange her inclinations for glory and reputation or her heart's desire for wealth and possessions. Therefore, she blooms in her youth and is green in her old age, and praises God on the heritage of her fathers, that she has not been bartered away. Ask the fortunate ones: 'Where is the road to Gilead?' They do not know. For who has all the plagues, infirmities and diseases? Those who dwell in cities. A breeze blows them over, and a little word makes them unhappy for a lifetime. Every joy flees before their pride, and envy, like a worm, gnaws them in the marketplace. If ye would but consider these facts, my

lords and masters, ye would leave the city to dwell in the country."

Jedidjah here interrupted Sithri:

"Save thy words for a fast-day, then thou mayest preach in the gates; to-day is a holiday, so let us drink and be merry!"

He presented his guests with wine, and then continued:

"Drain the cups, all of you, for the Lord has richly poured out his blessings upon city and country."

Then the cups went round—once, twice, thrice.

Azrikam drank to quench his rage, for he was sick at heart over the events of the day, and his pride had been deeply wounded; but Jedidjah turned to him, saying:

"I have heard that thy steward, Achan, refused to bestow the customary gifts upon the poor."

"I have already to-day reproved him for this fault," he replied, "and now I will send a servant with the order to keep his hand open for all the poor."

"Therefore, I praise thee, my son," replied Jedidjah, "walk in the paths of virtue and mildness, as did Joram, thy father."

Azrikam now sent the servant that he might receive the title of benefactor, but in his heart he begrudged the alms.

The sons of the prophets then gave Amnon a friendly shake of the hand, and as evening had now come on, they blessed Jedidjah and his

family and took their leave. Amnon wished to depart with them, but Jedidjah detained him.

Azrikam wanted Theman and Thamar to spend the evening with him, but Thamar was unwilling to go. Theman, however, after being urged went, and Zimri joined them. Before going, Theman said to his father:

"Oh! that Amnon might ever remain with us!"

Upon this, Jedidjah said to Amnon:

"I have had a room in the upper story whose windows look out upon the gardens prepared for thee, and I will care for all thy needs. Now conduct thyself bravely and faithfully."

Then he took him by the hand and led him out before the eyes of Abisai, Sithri, Azrikam and Theman. When they reached the room, Jedidjah said:

"See, here thou hast a bed, a table, a chair, and a candle. I have also put a harp and a lute herein, for I have heard that thou understandest them like a master."

Amnon said:

"My lord, how do I merit so much favor?" and he thanked Jedidjah, who went his way.

Wrapt in deep thought Amnon remained alone in his new abode. From every corner of the jubilant city the noise of the multitude reached his ears. Happy songs resounded from all the heights and streets of Zion. Young men and maidens joined in the dance, and even the old people tripped behind, gazing with delight at the young people's enjoyment. All rejoiced in the protection of the Almighty, and in their wise and

good king. At this high Feast of Peace, Mt. Zion was lighted with oil-lamps, numerous as the stars of heaven, while the Tower of David and the other towers shone like gleaming sapphires.

The moon poured the silvery light over the whole city. Amnon leaned from his window and could not gaze enough at the glory spread before his eyes. Then he perceived Thamar, who with her maid Maacah was strolling through the gardens. She also saw him, and as she wished to be free from Maacah's presence, she sent her into the house with the order to prepare a dish of cool, sweet pomegranates. When she found herself alone, she went under Amnon's window and spoke to him:

"Dear youth! a mighty one has known thee in a vision. Behold! a young man with thy figure and countenance appeared to Hananel, my grandfather, in a vision. The prophecy declared he should become great and important in our house, and should hold his head high. If thou shalt be able to fulfil this, thou wilt become strong and mighty, for much good is foretold of thee. Therefore, tell me thy origin that I may be certain."

Amnon's eyes moistened as he heard these words.

"Deceive not thyself with dreams," he replied, "thou noblest of women, for how canst thou believe that I shall ever hold my head high. I am poor, and low-born, and my origin is unknown even to Abisai, who bought me from a strange man when I was a child."

Thamar answered:

"Trouble not thyself over that, my friend, for the eyes of men behold in thee so much kindness, beauty, courage, and bravery, who among Zion's daughters will not desire to win thy love?"

Amnon asked with a sigh:

"Will any maiden in Zion exchange beauty for riches, or courage for high birth and origin?"

"Who knows!" answered Thamar, "perhaps, already there is a maiden in the city who values your love more than her life, and will not consider thine origin."

They could continue the conversation no longer, for Maacah returned to the garden and summoned Thamar to go to her mother who was waiting to go with her for a walk through the streets of the city. They requested Amnon's company, and then they sought together the place where the happy tribes held sway. Thamar's hope was strengthened upon learning that Amnon's origin was unknown, for Hananel's dream had foretold: "His descent is unknown, but in the course of time it will be revealed."

Upon reaching his house Azrikam asked Achan if he had distributed the alms among the poor.

"Certainly, my lord!" he answered. "I opened my hand wide as thou commandedst, and distributed rye and wine in abundance."

This made Azrikam very angry, but he concealed his feelings until Theman and Zimri had gone. His anger was fiercest against the servant who had brought him into bad odor with Jedid-

jah, and he struck him fearful blows. He said to Achan:

"From this day henceforth thou shalt know that when I say to thee, 'Give this man freely,' thou shalt not do it, acting according to my intentions. Judge not after the mildness of my mouth, but after the hardness of my heart."

"Why wilt thou," said Achan, "make me the target for the curses of the poor? Thou removest the curse of the poor from thyself that they may fall on me."

"Thou miserable slave, how dost thou dare to speak such words to me!" cried Azrikam, "shouldest thou not fear thy master's anger more than the curses of these ragged fellows? What I have once decided, I will not alter. Therefore, fulfill all my commands and let not the slightest word which I have said to thee be made known to others; moreover, tremble lest I lift up my hand against thee! Joram, my father, through his kind-heartedness, indulged thee in thy youth, but my hand shall be heavy upon thee in thine old age."

Achan, fearing his master's anger, did as Azrikam commanded, and his name was cursed.

Theman and Zimri returned home. The lights in the palaces and cottages were gradually extinguished, the shouting of the merry-makers ceased, the noisy streets became quiet; soon all was still throughout the city. Here and there a straggler could be seen, and from time to time the voices of the watchmen could be heard calling to each other:

"Praised be the Lord of Zion, who dwelleth at Jerusalem, Hallelujah!"

Amnon had sought his bed, but he could not sleep for his soul was full of the glory of Zion and of Thamar's wonderful words, over which his heart despaired. He thought:

"Thamar is removed from me as far as the heavens from the earth. When her father perceives my love for her, he will consider me a stumbling-stone and will send me forth with shame and disgrace."

When he thought of Azrikam he began to tremble and shudder, and he said to himself:

"O Thamar! thou who art so pure and yet so fearful! Mountains tower about thee, and I fear to ascend them."

Filled with such thoughts he tossed upon his bed for the whole night, and when the God-fearing awoke early to pray, his eyes had found no sleep. Thamar also was sleepless, so in the last hour of the night-watch she awoke Maacah, and they went into the garden. When they passed Amnon's window a light was burning in his room, and, behold, they heard the sound of a harp and Amnon's voice as he sang the following:

Peace dwells alone within the shepherd's tent,
  Alas! why didst thou leave that blest abode?
Woe to the exultant fool on greatness bent!
  He soon bows down beneath his heavy load.

O Thamar, lofty one, my love for thee
  Is wonderful! Nor Amnon dost thou scorn.
To the chief corner thou exaltest me.
  A common stone. Yet woe! I am low-born!

O thou, my heart's desire, avert thy glance
From Amnon lowly born and love-beguiled!
And on some prince lift up thy countenance;—
Thou art high-born—a prince of Judah's child.

Peace dwells alone within the shepherd's tent.
Why dost thou longer chase the wind unblest?
Leave Zion and her fools on greatness bent;—
To Bethlehem return—there is thy rest.

Maacah had fixed her eyes upon Amnon since the first time she saw him at Bethlehem, but fearing her mistress's jealousy, she concealed her love in her heart. Therefore, when she heard the last words of Amnon's song, she said to her mistress:

"See now, how unhappy Amnon is since he has left the shepherd's pastures to dwell among the nobles and share their disquiet. He looks sorrowfully in thy face, and lifts his eyes hopelessly to thee. Thou knowest not how to reply to him, for thou knowest thou canst not return his love without shame to thy parents and thyself."

Maacah said it deceitfully, for she intended, if Amnon went away, to follow him and marry him.

Thamar answered:

"My heart tells me that Amnon has come here to become great. All who see him love him. This is a sign that the Lord is with him, and besides, who knows what the future will bring forth."

CHAPTER VIII

The Jealousy of Azrikam

HEPHER and Bukjah had gradually sunk deeper and deeper in want and poverty, for God's curse had rested upon all their deeds ever since they committed the terrible crime in Joram's house. When they began to want for bread to put on their table, they went to Mattan, the unjust judge, and besought him to assist them in their need, because they had been ready to be his tools when he contrived the plot against Hagith, whom he hated, to secure Joram's treasure for him, and to bear false witness against Naomi.

"Naught remains to me of Joram's treasures," Mattan answered, "save care and sorrow. Why should I reward you now for your sin, when I repent that I ever originated it? Still, I will see what can be done for you: therefore, be patient for a little while."

One day Mattan repaired to Azrikam, and said to him:

"Thou sittest quietly, without anxiety in thine house, and knowest not that danger threatens thee. Behold! Chepher and Bukjah have been to me and spoken thus: 'We confess ourselves guilty concerning Naomi, against whom we bore false witness. Now, we are determined to go before the elders and tell them all, and they

will remove from Naomi the crimes of which we falsely accused her.' Who knows? perhaps Naomi may have borne a son to thy father, who will some day return to take Thamar, thy bride, from thee, for from a child she has been promised alone to Naomi's son. He would also claim half of thy possessions. Therefore, approach the two villains with gifts; then thou mayest dwell undisturbed on thy father's estate. See, I am kindly disposed towards thee, so I restrained them from making their declaration before the elders in the gates. Still, I fear their need will drive them to confession, for such people are always embittered by poverty and consider little what may happen to them afterwards. They think that what is lost is lost, and the fear of punishment will scarcely prevent them from carrying out their purpose. Again, what would it benefit thee if they were punished and thou shouldest lose the half of thy possessions?"

"Thou hast done me a great kindness," Azrikam replied, "and I will never forget. I will give Chepher and Bukjah what they need."

* * *

Azrikam kept his word, and Chepher and Bukjah were kept from want. But when Achan saw that strangers were fed upon his son's abundance, while he with Helah, his wife, and their remaining children must toil to keep soul and body together, he gnashed his teeth and his heart nearly melted with rage. Both he and his wife wept over the matter, and he said:

"Curses be upon Mattan, the wicked judge, who hath induced me by his trickery to make our son Nabal, whom they now call Azrikam, great. Now, he has the ascendency over us, is our master, and treads us underfoot. Truly, I am at last tired of biting my lips. I can no longer restrain myself; to-day or to-morrow I will tell him the truth, no matter what may happen to us."

Helah replied:

"Be not hasty, Achan! If a single word thereon passeth thy lips, then we and our children are lost. What then forces thee and gives thee the courage to proclaim in all the lanes that thou art the father of a prince in Judea? Rejoice over it in silence, and cease talking."

Achan sadly replied:

"Yes, he is a prince and will let his scepter dance on our backs, then first shall we understand how miserable we are; yet know, were it not that I cared for our children, I would speak freely to him."

Achan went forth and complained bitterly to Mattan of his son, who had put him to shame. Mattan answered:

"The honor of thy son shines only in the darkness; should the light break upon him, thy shame would be revealed, then thy evil deeds would come to light, and thou and thy wife be lost. Thy heart is grieved because thou dost daily receive shame when thou didst expect honor. This will become lighter to thee when thou hearest that it is still worse with me than with thee. Only for a moment did I enjoy the pleasure of my revenge upon Hagith for the in-

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jury which she did me. Repentance over this crime gnaws my breast continually; and when I think that I persuaded thee to destroy the last scions of the house of Joram, the children of a man who always treated me well, and to ruin Naomi who never wronged me, I feel unspeakable torture. Who has reaped all the advantages, and all the honor? Thy son! Oh, these deeds burn like fire in my bones! By day I go bowed down and gloomy, and by night my conscience gives me no rest."

Achan smote his brow, crying:

"Oh, it were easier for me and my wife to be beaten by Hagith's hand, than by that of our child. I have raised up a snake in my master's house! When I think of Naomi, whom every one so dearly loved, it seems as if my heart would break, for who knows what has become of her."

Thereupon, Mattan answered, appearing like one whom the matter very closely concerned:

"Therefore, Achan, let us keep our own counsel and be silent as the grave."

Mattan did not exaggerate when he described his pangs of conscience, for truly he went around like his own shadow, and no one knew what troubled him. Of what avail now were all Joram's treasures? They lay hidden in a spot where no one could see and admire them, and he himself was afraid to visit them in the daylight.

* * *

Amnon walked among the sons of the prophets, and all the household of Jedidjah loved

him with the exception of Zimri. The latter, when he spoke to Amnon, had indeed words of peace and friendship on his lips; but, in secret, he lay in wait for him, because Azrikam had one day said to him:

"This shepherd in Jedidjah's house is like a sharp thorn in my flesh, for he turns Thamar's heart from me. Therefore, assist me with thy counsel, and tell me what I shall do."

From this time Zimri kept a watchful eye upon Amnon, and reported to Azrikam all that he could discover, for he hoped some day to receive his reward.

Amnon, meanwhile, grew in wisdom and understanding and succeeded in all that he undertook. Jedidjah and Thirza loved him, and, as far as they could, conferred favors upon him. Theman looked upon him as a brother, but Thamar gave him her whole heart.

Jedidjah had given to Amnon for an attendant a boy named Purah, who usually brought to his master his meals from Jedidjah's table; for Amnon did not wish to eat with the latter daily, but only on the Sabbath, new moons and feast days. Azrikam also on the same holidays came as a guest.

Amnon had now dwelt for three months in Jedidjah's house, and it was again new moon. Jedidjah had already seated himself with his family at the table, but Amnon delayed his coming. When he finally came, Jedidjah placed him at Theman's right hand. Azrikam sat opposite, with Zimri at his side. Jedidjah turned to Amnon, saying:

"How lofty were the words of Isaiah to-day, when he opened the floodgates of his mouth, and his speech poured down in a mighty stream over the mountains of Zion. They have doubtless impressed thee also, Amnon, for thy mind is susceptible to all that is beautiful."

"Should not all the dwellers in Zion," replied Amnon, "hear and understand the preacher of repentance in the gates?"

Jedidjah proceeded:

"Not every ear is skillful to try the word, and not every heart is able to understand all things fully. Is it not so, Amnon?"

"Verily," Amnon answered, "the words of Ben-Amos are exalted above the speech with which the mouths of other prophets overflow. His heart is kindled from God's sacred altar, his soul has left behind the world and what is therein, and despises its noises and ambitions; it soars as an eagle which rises to heavens, and describes a circle above, where only God dwells as king in his Sanctuary. His eyes behold the justice of the Almighty, and he foresees the counsel of God unto far distant times. From great heights he observes the ends of the earth; his gaze tries his people, it searches their walk and penetrates their deeds. But when he perceives the sins of Judah wallowing in the street, then he flies down from his height, as an eagle upon his prey. He carries the wrath of God with him; his voice thunders; a holy flame rushes from his mouth which burns the sins of the people and consumes their misdeeds. However, his wrath endures but for a

season; after the storm comes a soft breeze, full of fragrance. Then his lips distribute comfort and blessing, and he refreshes the souls of his hearers with gentle words. Many times he pictures to us the Lord of the heavenly hosts as he appears in his awful glory, enthroned on the seat of the cherubim, and surrounded by the seraphim, who stand about him with outstretched wings ready to hasten whither he may send them. Many times he carries us into other countries and shows us the happiness and misfortune of their people. We perceive their prosperity, the peaceful time of their splendor, and their final downfall and dissolution. Isaiah shows us all this as in a panorama, for he sets everything vividly before us. Our eyes behold the great form of a mighty people as it towers toward greatness, then tumbles to decay; and our ears hear the noise of the kingdoms, their rejoicing and their mourning. Aye, he is the mightiest of prophets and his speech is a wonderful gift of God. With power he carries his hearers with him; he captures their hearts and leads their thoughts whither he wills."

The listeners sat in wonder around the table until Amnon had ceased talking. Jedidjah said:

"Thy tongue, O Amnon! is like the pen of a ready writer. Continue to gain wisdom, then shall my heart rejoice over thee."

Thereupon Theman spake:

"Behold! thousands receive the words of the mightiest of prophets, but only one heart among the thousands understands them rightly; yet among the few who thus understand his words,

is he who is able to reproduce the same clothed in beautiful language."

Azrikam was consumed with displeasure during this conversation, yet he remained silent.

Another day, Jedidjah, in the presence of his family spoke as follows to Amnon:

"See! thou hast saved my daughter from the fierce lion, for thine arm is strong; why should my hand be too weak to repay thee for thy deed? Therefore, accept a sum of money which thou, thyself, may estimate, as a ransom for my child's life. Azrikam will also reward thee and bestow upon thee an inheritance of fields and vineyards, for all his possessions are valueless to him in comparison with Thamar, whom thou hast saved for him. Accept my offer, and take care therewith to found a household."

"I have once already said that I will accept nothing. My reward is too great if thou wilt continue to be my protector."

These words greatly pleased Thamar. Jedidjah also kept them in his heart, and spoke no more with Amnon with regard to the matter. Thamar thought continually of Amnon, while he, in silence, cherished his love for her.

* * *

Spring had again visited the land. On the first new moon Amnon came early in the morning to Jedidjah's dwelling, and found there only Theman and Thamar. Jedidjah still tarried in the gates, and Thirza had gone to visit a friend.

Thamar greeted Amnon and asked after his health.

"I am well, my lady," he answered.

"It appears not so," she said, "for why dost thou thus hang thy head?"

Theman answered in Amnon's stead:

"His soul is terrified over all the ominous prophecies of Ben-Amos, who is fearful of Zion's future. His thoughts turn first to the numerous breaches in the walls of the city of David, and then to the small number of her warriors."

Amnon replied:

"Does not the Lord of hosts, the Protector of David's city, watch over this and that? Yet know for one, Theman, Zion's warriors are not so few as thou thinkest."

"Yes, they are innumerable," interrupted Theman, "because the angels would descend from heaven to fight for us on the walls and battlements."

"Certainly," said Amnon, "when God sees that we have no more warlike men, and that our strength is too weak, He will also descend from Heaven to fight for us, but our hand is not yet shortened. If ever the Assyrian should approach our borders, then every man, rich or poor, low-born or noble, would joyfully fight for his country. Has not our native soil cherished us from infancy, has it not guarded and sheltered us from the day when first we set foot thereon, and will it not remain faithful to us until we are gathered to our fathers where we shall rest in her cool bosom? The country people who cultivate the soil, the priests and Levites who wait upon the

service of God, the workmen and artists who practice their crafts, the judges who watch over virtue and justice, the overseers who stimulate the people to labor, can pursue their occupations and perform their labor in time of peace only; yet when the day of confusion comes and the enemy, like a mighty stream which has broken through its barriers, pours itself upon the land which has borne and cherished them, then the peasant will leave his plow, the artificer his tools, the judge descend from his seat, the priest forsake the sanctuary. They will rise up as one man, associate themselves together as warriors, and go forth to battle for their fatherland. When I heard the voice of Ben-Amos, and understood his words as he described the great hosts of warriors, it seemed as though my own ears heard the cornets and trumpets and the tumult of battle. My soul was aroused by the words of the man of God, and my heart clothed itself with courage. Therefore, since I find strength in me, and my hand is both quick to bend the bow and skillful to manage a horse, I will join the horsemen and accomplish wonders with bow and sword. How handsome are our horsemen! How bravely they grasp their steeds and urge them on until they rush along like an army of locusts! In the King's Valley our heroes are exercising themselves in running and fighting; yonder is the Mount of God and our fortress; yonder will He descend to succor our hosts and the cause of our king. Oh! would it be granted me, with these heroes, to pour out my blood for our fatherland! For a young man like myself there is nothing more

beautiful than to fall on the field of honor, for I have nothing to lose and little enough to hope for."

Thamar, who had been trying with all her might to suppress her tears, said to him:

"Hast thou really nothing to hope for? Oh! lose not courage. Hope, Amnon, for hope is life."

Theman added:

"Why hast thou refused the treasure which our father offered thee for saving Thamar's life? Yet know, thou hast certainly captured my sister's heart, for esteem and good-will towards thee abide therein; perhaps love too, who knows?" While he thus spoke he looked smilingly at Thamar, but she said:

"Pray go on, thou reader of the heart," and betook herself to her own apartment.

Theman said to Amnon:

"By my life! Thamar loves and treasures thee as her own brother, therefore all my life long I also will call thee brother and whither thou goest I will go. My father will certainly grant thy wish, and assign thee a place among the horsemen. I will remain at thy side to wonder at thy strength, and to rejoice over thy courage. Thy right hand will do wonders, and thou wilt be called a hero in Judea. But now know, my brother, that for me also all hope is over. Regard it not that I am a prince's son, for all my father's power and treasures cannot restore to me the peace of mind of which I have been robbed. Behold my heart tarries continually on the mountains of Carmel, where I saw the crown of

beauty, the loveliest of maidens; there yonder, the beautiful vision vanished. Now, I grieve in glowing desire, and my soul languishes in disquiet and unsatisfied longing. Still, I will bury my sorrow in my own breast and let not a word more pass over my lips. Only this thou mayest know, that thy friendship alone can compensate me for my lost love, therefore, my soul clings to thee."

Amnon said:

"Verily, now I have enough. I have acquired much in thy father's house, and if I possess the friendship of thee and thine, what need have I of money and possessions? Friendship is sweet, and its home is in heaven. It is like a beautiful wreath in the hand of the Lord. Like a fond mother it comforts man in his sorrow, and helps him to endure the toil and burden. The Creator of all, who has prepared a remedy for every sickness, has made it a cure for the thousand plagues of mankind. Happy the man to whom friendship is allotted, for it sweetens the cup of sorrow that he shall not taste its bitterness. What is a man without friends? A target for every flying arrow, a plaything for every misfortune. He is like a ship in mid-ocean with broken oars, shivered masts and crushed helm. He who possesses no friend, spends his short span of life in pain and trouble.

"Happy, on the contrary, is the man whom God has blessed with true friends, who comfort him in time of distress and whose tears are a healing balm for his wounds. Truly, friendship is more precious than the love of woman, and

more to be desired than gold, riches and all treasures."

Meanwhile Jedidjah and Thirza had returned home. They had called Azrikam also, and he soon appeared. Theman, during the meal time, asked his father to speak with the captain regarding Amnon's having a place among the horsemen. Jedidjah promised to do so, and his wish was granted on the same day.

Jedidjah presented Amnon with a noble Egyptian horse, and he betook himself to the King's Valley to become expert in warlike ways. However, he ceased not to seek after the presence of God, and to follow the teachings of the prophets and wise men; therefore, he became proficient in these matters, and grew daily in beauty, strength and knowledge.

CHAPTER IX

The Forsaken

THE harvest time was at hand. Azrikam sent Achan, his steward, in search of reapers for his fields, which were situated in the environs of Jerusalem. Achan repaired to the Valley Gate, where he unexpectedly chanced to find a secluded alley wherein all kinds of common people, reapers, vine-dressers, wine-pressers and other day laborers dwelt. His attention was attracted by a miserable hut, whose walls appeared to sink into the ground, for it stood up to the window sills in the earth. An elderly woman and a young maiden sat before the hut, talking with each other and spinning industriously. The woman was of stately appearance, but a deep sadness pervaded her manner. The maiden was wonderfully beautiful, sweet and fresh as a young rose.

Achan approached them and said:

"God be with you, ye virtuous women!" They returned the salutation with: "The Lord bless thee."

Achan asked:

"Will ye not swing the sickle among the reapers, or gather the gleanings, for I perceive

that ye are poor. See, the harvest time has come, and the old corn has been consumed; we shall soon present the first fruits before the Lord, and then the poor will eat the bread of the new harvest."

While he was thus speaking, he never removed his eyes from the two women. The elder replied:

"We keep by ourselves in this our hut, and do not go into a stranger's field."

Achan then asked them how they supported themselves, and the woman replied:

"By the work of our hands, for we spin and weave veils and girdles, thus we obtain our support. We eat not the bread of idleness, for sloth is always the beginning of crime, and crime leads to the grave."

"Doubtless thou art a widow," said Achan, "and this maiden is thy daughter. She is very beautiful, and it is not proper for her to dwell in so miserable a cottage. Were a nobleman to behold her, he would take her into an ivory palace, and clothe her in purple and costly silks."

The woman answered:

"There is a proverb which says, 'Jealousy dwells in palaces, while contentment abides in cottages.'"

Achan looked closely at the woman while his heart beat loudly with wonder and astonishment, for he had recognized his mistress, Naomi, Joram's beloved wife. He did not acquaint her with his discovery, but hastened in confusion

from the hut. Upon reaching his house, he related the occurrence to Helah, his wife, and concluded:

"My heart bleeds when I think of the tenderly cherished Naomi, and the situation in which I have this day found her. I pity her and our master's daughter, who blooms like a little rose in the desert. Woe be to us! who have done so much evil to Joram's house. What have we thereby gained for our soul's good?"

Helah was shocked at the news, but she said:

"Be silent, let not one word of all this pass thy lips, for thou wouldst drag the honor of our son in the dust, and destroy all our hopes."

Achan complied, saying:

"This will I do for them. I will return there and purchase a veil or a couple of girdles from them, and I will pay a three-fold price for them from my sin's income to relieve their needs; for all Joram's possessions rightfully belong to them."

* * *

The year had rolled away, and as the day on which Amnon rescued Thamar from the lion was again about to return, Jedidjah resolved to prepare a feast at his house as a memorial. He therefore sent to Azrikam, and invited him to appear at the head of the guests on the following day.

When the invitation reached Azrikam, he called Zimri to him and said:

"I know Zimri that thou art my friend, for that reason I will speak freely to thee. This festival at Jedidjah's house greatly vexes me, for it is in remembrance of that odious deed of Amnon's, which he performed for Thamar. This shepherd will to-morrow hold his head high and be elated, for he knows how to assume an air of loftiness and consequence, which will obscure the light of my countenance in Thamar's eyes."

Zimri answered him with these words:

"Truly, Amnon looks very fine in the garb of a soldier, and when he paces along, arrayed with shield and sword, Thamar looks upon him as a hero; and not she alone, for every one who beholds him is impressed by his appearance."

This made Azrikam still more angry, and he said:

"No! I will not go to this feast to-morrow. I will send word that I am ill."

Zimri sought to appease his wrath. "Thou art right," he said, "Amnon is a hindrance, an iron wall which separates thee from Thamar, thy heart's desire. Perhaps thou thinkest on that account to turn back and approach her no more, and thus make thy case better. By no means; it is never well to turn one's back to the foe. Go to the wild beasts, they will instruct thee; go to the lions and leopards and learn from them how to entrap thine enemies. The lion crouches and remains silent, while he burns with desire to tear his victim in pieces. The leopard hides himself and lies in his den, while he pants after the blood of his prey. The wild beasts neither cry nor roar in their lairs, so the traveler passes heedlessly

along, then falls into their clutches. Every sly and crafty man should do likewise, for God gave the beasts claws and sharp teeth, but he gave to men only cunning and a false tongue. The teeth of the lion have torn thousands in pieces, but a false tongue has destroyed ten thousands. The lion's teeth are red with blood, but deceit devours its victims, then wipes its mouth and says: 'I have done no evil.'

"Therefore, hearken and I will teach thee wisdom. In this city the art of prosperous living is this: by night, think and reflect on every sin; by day, smite thy breast and bow thyself before the words of the priests. Bite with the teeth, but bless with the lips. Suppress, also, thy hate against Amnon; let thy mouth overflow with love and friendship for him, but in thine heart contrive snares and intrigues against him. When hate burns fiercest in thy bosom, show a friendly countenance to him and take no notice of anything. Like lead, which produces neither a glow on thy face nor steam in thy nostrils, so let thine anger be hidden. If thou doest thus, then wilt thou entangle Amnon, and then afterwards wash thine hands in innocence."

Azrikam answered:

"Sorcery dwells on thy lips, and the words of the seraphim flow from them; therefore tell me wherewith thou wilt destroy the friendship between Amnon and Theman, for their covenant is firmly established."

"I will do it," said Zimri. "Like a sly hunter I will bend my bow in secret, and send my arrow out of an ambush. I will conduct myself towards

Amnon as gentle as the dew of heaven, and implant in the hearts of Theman and Thamar love and good will for him. My praise shall grow as lovely flowers on the day they are transplanted, but they shall never come to maturity, for out of my ambush I will call down upon them a storm which will root up all the shoots of love, and they will at once fly away from Thamar's heart like chaff from the threshing floor. I will, with a skillful hand, sever the three strands of the cord of friendship between Amnon and Jedidjah's children, and my craftiness shall turn the one against the other so fiercely that a smoke shall ascend from them which shall so blind their eyes that they shall not perceive the flames which consume them. Still let us conceal our secret, for darkness must be our light. Thus do the fishermen cast their nets only on a cloudy day when the waters of the stream are covered with mud and filth."

Azrikam placed wine before Zimri, who drank with pleasure, saying:

"Verily, the wine tastes sweet in our mouths, but the hands of many men are needed to prepare it. There must be planters, gardeners, vinedressers and wine-pressers. Canst thou understand the meaning of my words?"

Azrikam reflected upon them, and after a while he said:

"Thy words are like deep water, for thou goest to the foundation of everything, so help me to interpret thy words."

Zimri answered:

"A successful project seems sweeter than wine to us, but in order to carry it out we need many skillful hands; these are all empty, and will do nothing unless they are filled. See, I speak to thee freely, and with uncovered thoughts; therefore open thy hands where there is need."

Azrikam said:

"Thy words appear lofty to me, also I will elevate thee as a prince to me. My heart and my hand shall henceforth stand open to thee, and I desire nothing from thee save that thy hands shall skillfully perform what thy mouth knows so happily to express."

The same day Azrikam went out to his threshing-floors. He thought to himself:

"My threshing-floors are full of old corn. I will sell this before the new corn is brought in, I shall then have no lack of money which I need for the execution of my plan, for I will not encroach upon my treasure-chamber."

When he had made all the needful arrangements, he said:

"Well now! let us see whose hand is the stronger, mine or Amnon's!"

The next day Azrikam took a bath, anointed himself with costly oil of myrrh, put on his holiday attire and went to Jedidjah. He arrived there before the other guests had assembled, and went to Thamar's apartments in order to greet her.

Thamar answered his greeting with the words:

"Peace be with thee, my lord!"

Thereupon, he said to her:

"Has not the time come when thou shouldest no more address me with the words 'my lord,' but as 'my beloved?' "

Thamar replied:

"Truly, I no longer know how I should address thee. Thou hast oft reproved me because I did not show thee sufficient honor. I have now received thee with the honorary title which is thy due as a prince, why doth this annoy thee?"

Meanwhile Theman entered and stepped to the window which looked out upon East street, and beckoned with his hand. Thamar also went to the window in order to see who was there. She beheld Amnon, clad in costly attire and full military equipment, with coat of mail and helmet, and sword girded on like a champion, exercising his horse beneath. Proud and stately he sat upon his horse, on whose back the lion's skin was outspread. The horse looked brave as though he were going to battle; his nostrils fumed, and his mouth foamed; he neighed proudly, tossed his head high in the air, and pawed the ground with his hoofs; he pranced higher and higher, but his rider held him in check with his strong hand until he became tame and gentle, and then rode under the window where Theman and Thamar stood.

Theman called down to him:

"Whither will thy horse carry thee in such haste?"

Amnon replied:

"To the King's Valley, for he knows that the time has arrived when he shall run in the race-course with his mates."

But Thamar asked:

"He knows his time, but why hath his rider forgotten the season and the hour, and failed to appear among the guests?"

Meanwhile the horse had become restless. Then Amnon said:

"I have forgotten neither the season nor the hour, yet I also know my horse's desire, so I will ride to the King's Valley. I will not tarry there long."

Then Theman again spoke:

"Thy horse is proud of the lion's skin spread on his back," and added, "thy horse is like to many an empty-hearted man, who is proud of his clothing which he as little acquired for himself as did thy horse the lion's skin."

Amnon laughed at these words and gave his horse the bit, and he immediately went on his way like a light-footed hind.

Thereupon Theman turned again to Thamar and Azrikam, saying:

"How stately and handsome Amnon is! Is not his countenance fair and ruddy, and is he not clothed like a hero on the day of battle?"

Thamar responded:

"Were the dominion given to beauty, the kingdom would belong to Amnon, for he resembles David, the king of Judea."

"Yes, certainly like David, when he behaved foolishly before Abimelech," mockingly replied Azrikam.

Thamar gave the speaker a contemptuous look, and made no reply, but Theman replied:

"Why dost thou find nothing pleasant in Amnon?"

Azrikam answered:

"Because every moment he finds some new occupation. At one time he associates with the divines, then again with the warriors, and in consequence of this fickleness forgets his beginning and his end. In the beginning he was a shepherd, and in the end he will be a wind-bag. All his doing is vain: for had he accepted a gift from thy father's hand, it would have been wiser in him. How do his beauty, his strength, his singing and speaking benefit him? Can these serve in any way to conceal his poverty and low birth?"

Theman replied:

"Reflect again over thine own words, then thou wilt perceive how perversely thou hast spoken. As I have before said, if he were a prince's son, and stupidity and foolish ways belonged to him, then what profit would wisdom and understanding be to him when he can ornament himself with his ancestors' reputation, and can exalt himself with their riches? God has withheld from him these gifts of fortune, and instead has given him beauty, heroism and understanding. Wilt thou, therefore, lightly esteem these three gifts of heaven?"

"The three might yet be available," replied Azrikam, "but the fourth, eloquence, I find too abundant, for what use is that to the base-born? Can the words of the poor make any impression upon the hearts of his listeners, and will they abide there forever? In Zion all desire to be learned. The poor hold up their heads, as sons of the

prophets, and hunt after words. They seize fables, and beat their brains over proverbs and songs. They lift their mouths up to heaven, and from above their words flow down over men and people. They relate tales of the past, and foretell from them what the future will bring forth; yet for the present, and for their own needs they forget, and their latter days are sorrowful. They speak from heaven above, but on earth they have not a morsel of bread. Now, how does the heaven benefit them? It is altogether the Lord's. But the sensible man finds the satisfaction of his wishes on the earth. God has given the earth to men, that they may dwell and rejoice therein. They should anoint themselves, and pour out wine upon the altar to the honor of the Lord. But if these learned ones are asked they will say to you: 'God needs no offering.' Then I will ask again, how do they know this so well? Do they have a part in God's counsel, and has he revealed his will to them? In short, fables and songs are only useless trifles, and fine speeches are at bottom nothing but prattle."

Theman answered him:

"If all the people were to judge according to thy words, then the Proverbs of Solomon, which the learned men in the time of Hezekiah are collecting with great pains, are only idle prattle, and the Psalms of David must be considered as foolishness."

Then Thamar spoke:

"Dost thou not perceive, Azrikam, that thy words are utterly without sense and useless? If they bore fruit, it would be full of gall and worm-

wood." Then she turned again to the window to see if Amnon had returned.

Azrikam made no reply, because he feared his anger would rage like a flame, and he said to Theman:

"For the last time I will answer thee. As no low and wicked speech is becoming to kings, so fine speeches and verses are not suitable to a poor man, for who listens to his wisdom? See, these poor divines go about like the old-clothes men, and when they are offered silver for their goods, they say to the purchaser: 'It is lead,' and depart. Even so does it happen to these poor fools. The princes shake their heads at them, and the nobles deride them; therefore, it were better that they keep silence."

Theman replied:

"Perhaps, since thine ears are deaf."

"No," said Azrikam, "but one could become deaf from their very loud voices!"

"Still," said Theman, "a poor man who is wise and sensible deserves pre-eminence over a nobleman who is stupid and ignorant. The rich man's possessions end with him at the grave, but the teaching of the wise remains forever and their words descend from generation to generation. The souls of the wise are allied to God, and their descendants remember them with reverence for they are a glory to their grandchildren. Altogether different is the case with the nobles and chief-men, who are ignorant and whose hearts cling only to gold. What becomes of them when they die? No breath, no name, no remembrance; but whether you allow that I am right or wrong,

Azrikam, cease for a little to utter such absurd stuff."

Thamar had at last become weary of listening to all the foolishness which Azrikam, in the pride of his heart and the fire of his jealousy, had uttered and now spoke:

"Let us cease this discussion. We all know that ever since the Lord descended to Babel and confused the people's tongues, men have differed from each other in thought, word, and deed. The mind of the wise strives after knowledge, the upright and noble-minded speak frankly and honestly, the scoffers and fancy-mongers utter many idle and foolish words. The city of Jerusalem is full of all these species as a cage with different birds, therefore each must go his own way and seek those associates which are best adapted to him, thus each will reap what he has sown."

Azrikam now remembered the shrewd and cunning teaching which Zimri had imparted to him, and said:

"I have only attempted to express my opinion regarding Amnon. I wish him prosperity with all my heart. I will myself make him a present which will enable him to settle in peace on his inheritance. If I have done wrong, Thamar, show me my fault that I may atone for it."

"If thou persevere in thine error, or relinquish it, 'twill be all the same to me," said Thamar.

A violent rain now descended. It silenced the irritating conversation. Azrikam swallowed his vexation, ceased speaking of Amnon, and

began to talk of the rain which he said would ruin the work of his reapers in the fields. Thamar gazed out of the window and saw Amnon urging his horse on his return to the house, for the pouring rain had broken up the military exercises in the King's Valley. After a while Amnon and Zimri entered Thamar's apartment. The latter had scarcely cast his eyes upon Thamar and Azrikam ere he was aware that strife had occurred among them; and in order to understand the cause, he inquired how they had until now entertained themselves. Theman replied:

"We disputed over the question 'How could a man walk blamelessly?' "

Zimri bowed his head like a bulrush, cast his eyes to the ground, sighed, and explained:

"Ye wish to know how one born of woman can walk his way blamelessly and be found upright. This is indeed hard, for our sins are more than the hairs of our heads. Sin lurks at every step, and if man yields to his heart and his eyes he falls into its net. If a youth lifts up his eyes to look at a maiden that is sin. If a man listens to the sweet voice and pleasing speech of a handsome woman, that is transgression. Not only with sight and hearing, but with every deed of his hands, with every step of his feet, with the words of his lips, with the taste of his mouth, can a man sin against his soul."

Theman laughingly asked:

"Why not also with the smell of his nose?"

Zimri continued:

"Think not I am jesting. Not at all! Even now the sin which you deem impossible has be-

fallen me. I went into one of thy father's vineyards which he planted but a short time ago, the green grapes exhaled a sweet smell and this was agreeable to my nose. Truly, it was only a little sin, but nevertheless a sin, because the three years in which the vineyard must rest have not yet expired, and thus the agreeable fragrance enticed my soul to desire what belongs to God. Truly, it is not good for man to bear even the smallest sin, and if I were in the position to atone for it by an offering, I would bring two doves."

Theman replied:

"If men were to live according to thy words, Zimri, there would soon be no sheep in the folds, and no more cattle in the stalls, and the doves would become extinct. All the lambs of Kedar would not suffice for guilt-offerings, and all the cattle of Lebanon for sin-offerings and whole-offerings; for sin rests on every step, and every tread is a misdeed. The earth would become ruined and give way under our feet. Were God to charge all these against us, we should go wretchedly to the grave bowed down under the load of our misdoings. No, Zimri, thy way is not for men,—God's angels may walk therein. Now, Amnon, tell us thy opinion of this matter, but do not throw a stumbling block upon our path, nor show us the way of the stork in the sky, for we are earth-born."

Amnon modestly gave his views:

"Man has not to determine his ways and he has not to pass judgment, why should I then declare my opinion on this subject? However, I will repeat the words which I lately heard from

Prophet Micah of Morashti, and which I swallowed as one swallows the first grapes of summer as soon as he holds them in his hands. The words of Micah run thus: 'He hath shewed thee, O, man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly before thy God.' "

Theman said:

"Truly Amnon knows how to interpret proverbs and give their true meaning, therefore are his lips so pure and sincere."

Thirza now entered, for during this time she had been entertaining her visitors in Thamar's apartment, and exclaimed:

"Why are ye all gathered here? Walk into the hall whither my husband has returned with his guests from the Temple, where they have presented sacrifices and given the Lord praise and thanks."

They went thither, seated themselves at the table, ate, drank and were of good cheer. After the repast each blessed Jedidjah and all his household, and returned to his own house. Azrikam also went home, sad and ill-humored.

Theman turned to Zimri and asked:

"Still tell me, Zimri, wherewith have we sinned to-day, with the taste of our palates or with the smell of our noses?"

Zimri answered:

"Why wilt thou do evil with the mockery of thy lips? A youth may laugh and be merry, but such behavior does not appear proper in a man of my years, who with tearful eyes recalls the sins of his youth."

When Jedidjah heard this remark, he sent Zimri to his work and reproved Theman, saying:

"Why dost thou mock a sincere and extremely pious man? You should the rather follow his example and learn from him how to become wise. Behold him when he stands in the Temple, and with a pure heart and tearful eyes weeps before God. The priests see him and praise him, all the God-fearing honor him." Theman blushed at the words of his father, for he was ashamed of himself.

Jedidjah now repaired to the elders in the gate. Then Theman said to Amnon:

"Three days later we shall leave our winter abode to dwell in our summer house on Mt. Olivet, therefore be ready to go out there with me this evening."

Thamar said:

"Let us three walk up there together, for the rain has ceased and the sky is bright and clear."

* * *

When Azrikam, ill-natured, arrived at his house, one of his servants whispered in his ear that Achan had loaded an ass with some of the best wheat, and gone away with it. Then he became still more angry, but he waited until Achan had again returned. When he finally came back, Azrikam looked harshly at him, and said:

"Where does the band of thieves to whom thou hast taken thy master's goods, hide?"

Achan was startled at this question; he became confused, and could not answer. Azrikam

poured countless invectives upon him, seized him by the hair, and gave him a terrible box on the ear.

Then Achan's anger overcame him. He cried:

"Forbear, thou Nabal, thou foul beast, mongrel—born of the dregs of the people—forbear! else thy soul will go together with mine to hell."

Azrikam called his servant and shouted:

"Bind this fiend for me, thrust him into a pit, give him scant bread and little water. He shall remain there until his soul laments it."

Helah came to the palace, she wept and entreated mercy for her husband because she had been Azrikam's nurse, but he thrust her angrily away.

"These are the blows," cried Achan, "which my own hand have struck me, therefore implore naught from this good-for-nothing!"

The servants bound him and threw him down into a pit. Azrikam made the servant, who had betrayed Achan, his steward. Afterwards he sought Helah, in order to ascertain to whom Achan had carried the wheat. Helah feigned ignorance, although she knew he had carried the wheat to Naomi, who had only received from Achan that which was her rightful due.

CHAPTER X

The City Glorious

TO all the children of Zion, who ever gladly availed themselves of the privilege of breathing its pure air, and reposing under its shady olive-trees, Mt. Olivet was a delightful retreat.

Amnon, Thamar and Theman went at twilight up to this lovely place. Thamar said:

"In three days we shall leave the city to dwell here. Oh! I love Mt. Olivet!"

"Man's heart is changeable," said Amnon. "Therefore, the dwellers in the villages loathe their peaceful cottages and rush to the noisy city, where they hope to enjoy all the pleasures of earth. On the contrary, the dwellers in the cities become weary of the crowds, the narrow streets, and above all of the misery which abounds there; they long for the quiet of the woods and the peace of the fields. This place is truly beautiful because repose and activity are here united. Looking eastward from the top of this mountain, one beholds the broad plains of the Dead Sea, which are a true sign of God's wrath and of the doom of ancient generations to destruction, spread before our eyes. Southward, we gaze upon Jerusalem, a splendid picture of human activity."

"Hast thou ever seen the Dead Sea?" Thamar inquired.

He answered:

"Yes, my lady, when I returned from Bozrah. Our fathers tell us the spot was once like the Garden of Eden before the Lord laid it waste on account of the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah; now it is horrible to behold. It produces nothing except naphtha, sulphur and burning bitumen. The wilderness surrounds it, and no creature exists in the fearful solitude. There no nightingale sings, the birds of heaven shun the place, and the wild beasts flee in trembling from the spot where God's curse has rested for many generations. Yonder, in the moaning wilderness, Satan hovers on the wings of death. The King of Terrors reigns in the ruins of Sodom and Gomorrah, which we can see deep below the waters of the sea. All life has vanished from the dry, salt earth around it, and eternal silence prevails. The Jordan flows through the bosom of this terrible abyss, yet yonder its vigorous rushing ceases and its fishes die."

"Turn away," interrupted Thamar, "from these pictures of everlasting destruction and lift up thine eyes to the City of God. How charming the life and activity in its streets appear to those who stand here above. Gaze upon the splendor of the East Gate, and after that upon the bustle at the Water Gate, where just now the people go out in a long procession to draw water. Observe also the noise at the Horse Gate, through which the noblemen ride in their stately chariots to the Temple. One hears the rattling of the

wheels even here, and it sounds as pleasant, from this height, as the gentle roar of a light wind."

Theman added:

"Look yonder at the Fish Gate, where is exhibited the picture of a mighty people. Behold, how they buy and sell there the riches of seas and waters united, and there at the Sheep Gate, all the sheep of Kedar and the rams of Nebaioth are gathered."

"Behold!" cried Amnon. "The city is full of noise and bustle. How stately stand its palaces, while its towers, reaching to the clouds, resemble giants. The people in dense multitudes press through the streets. One man directs his steps here, another there, as he may be inclined, for purpose and desire are the angels who influence men's deeds. The ear perceives the bustle, but the understanding heart pursues its own right way, for all the activity of the multitudes and their purpose and desire are worthless unless they are from the Lord. For as the Sanctuary on Mt. Moriah is exalted above all palaces, so is the will of God above the will of those who dwell in houses of clay."

"Sing us," said Thamar, "one of thy songs of Zion, adapted to this spot from whence we can overlook the city with all its pomp."

Amnon seized his harp, and sang:

Jerusalem, the mighty,
  Zion our gathering place,
Jehovah hath thee chosen
  And shown to thee His grace.

O Ariel, David's city!
The watch o'er thee He keeps,
Who is the Rock of Ages,
Who slumbers not nor sleeps.

In thee, O Mother City,
The royal trumpets sound,
And din of many people,—
But no reproach is found.

The mountains round about thee,
How fair and strong they seem!
How clear thy crystal fountains!
Thine olive groves how green!

How glorious thy temple,
The Shekinah doth illume,
From whence God shines on Zion,
But Asshur doth consume!

Then hearken, all ye nations:
Jerusalem is strong.
O God! abide within her,
And be her strength and song.

"O bliss!" cried Theman, embracing Amnon. "O bliss! my eyes behold the glory of Jerusalem, and my ears hear a song of the loveliness of Zion!"

"And the song is as lovely as the City of God itself," continued Thamar with a joyful heart.

But Amnon said:

"Who can worthily sing of the splendor of Zion, or express its praise in song? He looks to the Gates of Justice, where the right is highly exalted, yonder are the seats placed for those who

administer justice. The elders, the judges, the law-givers and the compilers of the law sit there in pomp and splendor, each leaning upon his staff. Whenever any injustice is committed, either in the home or on the street, then the people go up to the gates and place the matter before the elders for settlement. Praised be the Lord of Justice, who has given us a good king, gracious to the upright, but terrible to the false and dishonest. He desires the right, and is swift in justice. We find no stain upon the city, and not in vain does Ben-Amos call it a valley of vision, for the eye of the beholder sees there wonderful sights which no painter with his brush, nor writer with his stylus can reproduce. Who can contemplate the many thousands of men in the houses and shops of Jerusalem, without exclaiming: 'Verily, strong and mighty is He who has created all this multitude of hearts!' Some teach the people, others feed them, others again administer justice; yet the teachers, the scribes, the magistrates, the farmers, labor on their own lines and each help the other. Gaze upon the Mount of God as they hasten to the gates as the people throng to hear the words of the prophet and preacher of repentance. Yonder, in the crowded places, the princes, the nobles and the men of affairs walk proudly, yet all perform their respective duties faithfully. It is truly a strong people, practising virtue and cherishing truth. Verily, it is evident that God's blessing continually rests upon this city, and that the Lord permits peace and prosperity to descend upon it. Therefore its enemies envy Jerusalem, and have long considered how they might bring

it to confusion and desolation. O Assyria! thy sword forces the people to deny God. Samaria thou hast already devoured, and hast made an end to the idolaters' riches. Here God is our stronghold. The arrows of our enemies will be shivered on the strong shield of our protection, for we have the everlasting Temple within our walls. Our king and our people trust in God, our keeper, and in Jerusalem, our strong fortress."

When Amnon ceased speaking, Thamar awoke as from a dream. She said:

"Thy words are pleasant, they refresh my heart. If thou hadst talked thus every day throughout the year, I should have forgotten to eat and drink. Still, I would ask one question: Pray tell me, is Zion really so pious a city? Dost thou find no fault in it?"

Then Amnon answered pleasantly:

"My lady, observe the olive-trees which are planted on this mountain, how they grow and flourish, but do all their branches bear blossoms and fruit? No, because many blossoms are cast off and fall to the ground. Hardly a tithe of the branches bear fruit. Even so it happens with the words of wise men, for only a small number of them find good soil. In like manner we cannot know concerning the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who belong to the tenth who serve God, therefore we should consider that each of our neighbors may be included in the number of God's holy ones."

"If this be so," Thamar asked, "what superiority has the wise man over the fool, and how shall one distinguish the good from the wicked?"

Thereupon Theman replied:

"The light of the wise grows brighter continually, while fools are surrounded with darkness, for the wise shine like the moon whose light is but small in the beginning, but when it reaches fulness the wolves of the night howl at it and the dogs yelp and bark, yet its soft beams are harmless."

Thamar said:

"Permit me, my brother, to pursue thy words still further. See, the moon shines brightly but it gives no warmth, while the deeds of the wise are like the sun; when it shines all nature rejoices, and exclaims: 'O joy! I feel the warmth, and see the light!' The fools are not so. They are like the mole, who, when the sun shines, creeps into his hole and never beholds the brightness."

Theman rejoined:

"I think I know the mole at whom thy words point. The mole who hides himself from the light, and moves in darkness is called—"

"I pray thee, my brother," cried Thamar, "mention him not, nor pollute this charming spot with his name. He walks in darkness, and his name will sometime disappear in darkness. I will never yield to him, and my determination will change as little as Mt. Zion, which will never leave its place to cast itself into the midst of the sea. Fortunately that terrible time is over wherein the fathers offered their sons to Moloch, and their daughters to gold-decked idols. Yes, this Azrikam—for I am forced to mention the hated name of this detested idol—appears to me as a monster, and I despise the gold and silver which

outwardly adorns him, and which he alone is proud of. What does the renown of his fathers, of whose honor he boasts, benefit him? I am angry with my father because he extends his friendship with the parents to a son whose actions are a reproach to their memory. Yes, my brother, my decision stands firm. I will never weaken and never yield, for I have sworn by my truth and my faith."

Theman said:

"I will now pursue thy truth and drive it into a narrow place where it shall be proved. I have ascertained who the mole is whom thy soul abhors; now, tell me also who is thy sun, the joy of thy life? Tell me, and do not deceive me, I charge thee by thy truth."

Thamar answered:

"The sun is visible to all who have eyes to see, and even if the clouds veil it for a little while, it will at some time dissipate them, and then its light will be revealed."

"Now, little sister," coaxingly said Theman, "do not speak in riddles"; turning to Amnon, he continued:

"Thou understandest proverbs and similes, so pour thy light upon my sister's words, for thou art her sun."

Amnon and Thamar became embarrassed at Theman's words, but the latter went on:

"The blush on thy cheeks is proof that I have rightly interpreted my sister's riddle. I have already watched you both, and know that your hearts seek the same destination. Now then, if thou dost consider it sinful, forget it; if not, why

dost thou confuse thy speech? Speak frankly and openly to me, if thou dost truly trust me."

Then Amnon said to Theman:

"It is exactly a year to-day since I rescued Thamar, and thus my deed—" He was unable to finish his words, his voice faltered, his eyes filled with tears.

Thamar turned aside from her brother to dry the tears which were flowing down her cheeks, and said to Amnon:

"No! thy deed shall not perish as a flower of the field, but shall blossom like a rose in my heart."

"Like a rose!" cried Theman, who at these words remembered his beloved rose of Mt. Carmel. "O, the rose blooms surely in its beauty, yet the hearts of men wither like grass!"

Afterwards they sat a while in silence, until a pathetic scene which occurred before their eyes attracted their attention. A sparrow-hawk with outspread wings, and talons sharp as iron and wide-open bill, followed a beautiful dove covered with shining plumage, which had already begun to weary in its flight. When the three saw this they began to scream, which so frightened the hawk that it turned from the dove, which regained a little strength. After a while the hawk began to pursue the dove again; she exerted all her powers and spread her shining wings as well as she could, to hide herself from her pursuer in the bushes or in a cleft of the rocks. Then Theman grew furious against the hawk, and because he pitied the dove he hastened to gather stones to

throw at the feathered robber. In this way he strayed some distance from his companions.

Amnon had not moved from the spot; unconsciously he clasped Thamar's hands within his own, and said:

"O, thou innocent little dove, how like thou art to Thamar!"

Thamar, without withdrawing her hands from the youth's, answered:

"Thou hast rescued me from the lion, and thou wilt also rescue me from the hawk which pursues me. I lift up this my hand in God's Sanctuary and swear to thee that since that day in Bethlehem thou hast become dearer to me than all others. Yet a second time thou wilt release my soul from the power of a pursuer, and then I shall be forever thine."

Amnon answered with these words:

"And I also will be thine forever; either I will walk with thee through life, or I will die alone and forgotten. I swear this to thee by the Holy Hill. One only have I found among all maidens, and to eternity I will know no other."

Then Thamar took Hananel's ring from her finger, gave it to Amnon, saying:

"See, the name of the living Thamar and the dead Hananel are engraved thereon, therefore this ring shall be a token that God has determined for us both either a life full of love or death."

Amnon had just opened his mouth to speak, when Theman returned. He walked wearily out from the olive-trees holding the rescued bird in his hand, and said:

"I have now seen that the Lord has defeated

the pursuer, and justice has overtaken the murderer; see, the dove could not flee away from her strong pursuer, and my arm was not able to rescue her. The hawk had already breathed upon her with his hot breath, already opened his mouth to devour her—then an eagle flew down from the height above upon the hawk, and in a trice he was seized by the claws of the stronger one and carried away from thence, but the dove fell exhausted to the ground, and I picked her up."

"May that be the end of all pursuers!" said Thamar, at the same time casting a glance full of love upon Amnon.

Theman said laughingly to Amnon:

"This may be a sign to thee that God will not deliver thy dove to her pursuer."

Then Thamar said:

"Why is it that to-day thou art continually searching after mysteries? Yet, even were my soul, as thou hast said, bound to Amnon, where would my hope remain, for Azrikam lies in wait for me as the hawk for the dove?"

Theman answered:

"Then Amnon shall resemble the eagle who spreads his wings over thee; he shall free thee from Azrikam's power, and vanquish thy tormentor through his zeal."

Thamar said laughingly:

"Present me with the dove to which thou hast compared me."

Theman gave her the dove with the words:

"Protect her, and may she be a true sign to thee."

Thamar said:

"I will cherish her as the apple of my eye."

After this Theman and Thamar led Amnon into the summer house, and showed him all the apartments.

Zimri now came to call them, and said:

"Why have you tarried so long? Your parents are waiting for you."

Theman saw that Amnon wore his sister's ring, yet he acted as if he did not observe it. Zimri also observed it, but he did the same and spoke of indifferent matters. On the way home Theman turned to Zimri and asked him with sincere heart to pardon the mocking words which he had this day spoken to him.

Zimri answered:

"I swear by my life, my lord, that I have already forgotten thy words; be it far from me that I should treasure them up in my heart against thee."

CHAPTER XI

The Affliction of Mattan

THE next morning, Zimri and Azrikam met on the street. They strolled to the Sheep Gate, passed the Fish Gate, and reached the Old Gate which is at the north of East Street. The streets of Zion were already full of life.

Zimri said to Azrikam:

"How great is this multitude of people! Are not buyers and sellers, crafty men and blockheads, mingled together therein? Men are foolish who pay gold for all the labors of their hands, for all the fruits of the earth, for all the beasts of the field; but no one understands the worth of a man or how to value himself. See, thou canst find all thou desirest in a man, and mould his will as thou choosest, and melt his heart in a silver crucible; then he will come forth as a tool for thy hand, adapted for good or evil, according to thy will. Thou canst create him anew every day, and he will be like a horned ox or a ravenous bear."

"I perceive that thou art burdened with news. Follow me home and tell me what thou knowest," said Azrikam.

Zimri, however, replied:

"No, a house is not the right place in which

to hold a confidential conversation, for the walls have ears, and crowded places are not adapted thereto; for there seven eyes are marking our every step, and seven ears listening to our every word, and if only a syllable passes our lips it will be as quickly caught as an escaped bird."

Azrikam replied:

"I know an excellent place; let us go to Karmi's wine-shop. He is a sensible man, crafty and cunning. He knows how to keep a secret to himself."

"For that very reason," said Zimri, "I will not impart mine to him. Let us go into the Vale of Tophet; there the curse of the graceless worshipers of Moloch forever abides, and the traveler has shunned the spot since the days of Hezekiah. That is a secret, solitary spot."

Azrikam assented:

"Good, let it be as thou sayest. Still, shouldest thou ever need me at night, go boldly to Karmi's shop, for he is in my confidence and will send for me."

They went into the Vale of Tophet and seated themselves under the lindens. There Zimri related what he had ascertained, and concluded:

"Yesterday Theman, Thamar and Amnon went together to the Mount of Olives, where they remained for a long time; and when I went to call them, I noticed Hananel's ring on Amnon's hand."

When Azrikam heard this, he sprang up quickly, crying:

"Woe is me! Thy words have suddenly shocked me. Hananel's ring on the shepherd's

hand! Then Hananel's dream is fulfilled. O Zimri, I have ever entreated thee to degrade Amnon in Thamar's eyes, and to render him abhorrent to her. But thou hast chosen the utterly wrong way by praising and exalting him in her presence. Why hast thou been so idle about thy work, and hast not rooted out the wormwood in its infancy? Now it has become strong and large, and thou canst not pull it up. Canst thou bend the top of a large tree as thou canst a bulrush?"

Zimri answered:

"Thou makest me laugh with thy reproach. Can I blind Thamar's eyes? Can I say to her that he is ugly while every one who beholds him exclaims: 'He is altogether lovely'? Yet once more I say to thee, in no wise do I repent of my mode of action, for the man who wears no mask upon his countenance is like a fish without scales, which all esteem unclean. Therefore, my mouth praises what my heart abhors."

"Why hast thou not spoken thereof to Jedidjah?" said Azrikam.

Zimri answered:

"Can I be the finder of secret artifices, and at the same time thy counsellor?"

Azrikam said:

"Only give me good counsel or find a wise device, for this Amnon of lowly origin appears to me like a bone which sticks in my throat, and which I can neither swallow nor spit out. See, the storks know their time; when to come, and when to depart. Should not a wise man like thee find out the right time for every design? Put the

right words into the mouth of another, that he may speak to Jedidjah."

Zimri answered:

"I have already said to thee, 'melt the heart of a man in a silver crucible, and he will come out a fit tool for thy deeds.' So then, listen: I will induce Pura, Amnon's boy, for the sake of a fine reward, to follow all his master's footsteps; and at the same time I will induce Maacah to say to Thamar what I shall put into her mouth. Now, give me the money, and let me hasten the work."

"Thou knowest that I esteem my money as nothing if it avail to advance our project," eagerly responded Azrikam. "Only strive at any price to turn Thamar's heart again to me. Still, what shall I give thee, Zimri? Require from me the half of my possessions, I will not refuse them to thee."

"Be quiet," Zimri urged. "I know the time for every design, and the coming day will put the means into my hands, and show me how to contrive evil against Amnon."

After this conversation they returned to the city, where Azrikam gave Zimri a sum of money with which to bribe Pura and Maacah.

Jedidjah and his family left the winter house to dwell in the Mount of Olives. Amnon also went with them, for his room in the city had been assigned to Sithri of Carmel, who had come to Jerusalem to dispatch some business. When Jedidjah had dwelt three days on the Mount of Olives, there came one evening a servant of Judge Mattan's, to call him to his master.

"What has happened to thy master that he has alarmed me so late at night," inquired Jedidjah, "by summoning me to him?"

The servant replied:

"The pangs of death suddenly overtook him, and then he asked for thee."

Jedidjah mounted his mule, and rode to the judge. Upon his arrival he seated himself beside the bed, and said:

"What aileth thee, Mattan?"

The sick man opened his eyes and stared at him, but could not answer.

Mattan's wife said to Jedidjah:

"An evil spirit has come over my husband, and the Lord has smitten him with hallucinations."

"Is it possible!" cried Jedidjah. "A month ago, already, I noticed him going about, sad and melancholy. I asked him the cause of his sorrow. He answered: 'It is only a slight sickness, which I shall overcome.' "

"He answered me in like manner when I asked him about his condition," continued his wife, "but the sickness continually oppressed him more and more. By day he was out of sorts, and by night fears, which I cannot describe, came upon him. When midnight came he began to tremble and shake; he rose up from his couch, wrung his hands, stamped his feet, raged, shouted, and repeated remarkable but frightful things, which, when I reflect upon them, cause my hair to rise. A month has thus passed in which God has allotted me nightly pain and misery. But

this night was worse than all before, and I am shocked at what my eyes behold, and writhe in anguish with what my ears hear. But when the evil spirit tormented him beyond measure, he sent his boy to call thee."

When she had finished her words the poor woman sprang up, for she saw that Mattan's eyes had begun to roll in their sockets, and were expanding with terror and anguish. Then Mattan began to scream with a fearful voice:

"O, Hagith, and her children!—the lioness and her young!—O, woe!—Who will put out the fire in my bosom? Away, away from me, thou dreadful woman!—bring not thine anger upon me.—Why doth not Naomi's house burn?—Thou sin-laden woman—the sins of my soul vainly pursue thee — I can not relate them — my evil deeds—no, I can not—for they are stronger than I—they overcome me—O, woe! O, eternal fire!"

Mattan could speak no longer, for a spasm seized him. He turned and writhed in agony, and with great exertion finally succeeded in taking a key from beneath his pillow and handed it to Jedidjah.

"This is the key of a vault," said Mattan's wife, "which, until now, no man save he alone has entered. Alas! my husband is dying," and she wept bitterly.

Jedidjah sought to comfort her. "Is there no balm in Gilead, or is there no physician there? Let not thy hope fail, for the Lord will send help from his Sanctuary and strength from Zion. Do not distress thyself over his words, for he has a

fever. I will go home now, but will come again to-morrow."

Jedidjah departed, but his thoughts were greatly disturbed over Mattan's strange words. He mounted his mule and rode through one street after another, until the heavens began to glow with a red light; and looking around he saw a pillar of flame, smoke and steam flaring up. He turned and rode back over the way he had come, and hastened to the scene of the fire. As he drew near he heard cries:

"Help! Help! Mattan's house is in flames!"

When he arrived there many people had already surrounded the burning building, but they were too late to extinguish the flames. Jedidjah knew by the smell of sulphur, which the flames spread abroad, that the fire had been kindled by human hands. He asked the bystanders if the dwellers in the house had been saved.

They answered him:

"When we reached here the flames were bursting out of each corner of the house, and no one ventured to plunge into the glowing fire to save the inmates."

Mattan's house burned to the ground, and the next morning it was only a heap of ashes.

Jedidjah took the warders of the city with him, and in their presence opened the vault to which Mattan had given him the key. How great was his horror to find here all the stores of jewels and precious articles which Joram, in his time, had kept in his treasure chamber.

"At last the matter is revealed," he said, "and Mattan has never spoken clearer than when his mind was confused."

Afterwards he ordered that all these treasures should be consigned to the elders, until the root of this evil deed which had happened in Mattan's house could be traced. Then he hastened home.

Thirza, meanwhile, had not closed her eyes during the whole night, because she knew not why her husband had gone so hastily to Mattan. And upon hearing that a fire had broken out in the city during the night, she became even more disturbed. She rose from her couch before the morning-light, and sent a servant to look for Jedidjah, and then walked among the olive-trees. A man came up the mountain of whom she asked what had happened in the city. He told her that Judge Mattan's house had been burned down.

Then Thirza clasped her hands together in deadly fright. At the same moment her anguish departed, for she saw Jedidjah coming up the mountain. She ran to meet him, fell on his neck, and cried:

"O, my husband! How great anguish hast thou this day caused me! Hadst thou refused to go to Mattan, my soul would not have been troubled the whole night concerning thee!"

"Had I remained here," said Jedidjah, "I should not have passed a night so full of misery and horror. Truly, my soul is only quiet and contented when I can abide with thee, my beloved."

She said to him:

"Thy words are smoother than oil, and I, like a silly dove, believe all that thou sayest. But tell me, is Mattan's house really burned?"

Jedidjah answered:

"It is even so. The fire consumed Mattan's house with all its inhabitants, but he himself died a villain's death."

Then he related to her all the events of the night from beginning to end, and concluded with these words:

"Alas! truth and faithfulness have vanished from the earth, for Mattan has practised shameful treachery towards his friend Joram, who gave him his entire confidence."

Then Thirza said, in surprise:

"Therefore, has my friend Naomi been banished while innocent, and she was not unfaithful to her husband, as we believed."

"I think so myself," said her husband, "but Chepher and Bukjah, two men who have always been found upright and worthy of belief, testified against her, and who can contradict their testimony? My thoughts are all confused over what I have this night experienced. Still, since rest and peace reign in my own house, I will go up to God's Temple. When I return we will talk still further over these matters."

Jedidjah went up to the House of the Lord, while the priests offered the morning sacrifice; then he went to Sithri, and asked him after he had repeated his prayers, to come home with him. Sithri was greatly surprised over the strange

events of the night, which Jedidjah related to him on their way to the summer house.

When they arrived there, Thirza placed food before them, with the words:

"The righteous have decreased, and the blameless have become few among the children of men. Who can now distinguish the pure in heart from the corrupt hypocrites?"

Then Theman said:

"So that is also the Mattan who was never weary of standing with outstretched arms before God, and who presented so many sacrifices and whole-offerings with tearful eyes."

Jedidjah rebuked him, saying:

"I have often already exhorted thee, my son, not to interrupt the talk of those older in years than thyself, for thou art not called upon to teach them."

Then he said to Thirza:

"Let us not on account of one man's sin condemn the whole world and all its inhabitants. Let us believe that faith still exists. If a man walks in crooked paths, he will in due time be exposed."

"Truly," exclaimed Sithri, with a sigh, "thousands of dwellers in the city use the Holy Name on their lips, but only a few cherish it in their hearts. Verily thousands bear it as a jewel on their breasts, but scarcely a tithe bind it about the loins. Therefore, we always find only one man among a thousand. How many are looked upon as pious among the godly, and as meek

among the lowly, yet the one seeks honor thereby and the other wealth.

"Many here and there wear virtue as a cloak when they are in the gates, but lay it aside in their own homes. Remember, Jedidjah, I have never looked upon Mattan with thine eyes, therefore I am not greatly astonished over his evil deeds; he sent widows unconsoled away because they came to him empty-handed. He has robbed orphans. These wronged ones pressed their claims continually in his ears, and cried aloud for justice until their throats were parched, but he answered them with smooth words: 'What then am I that ye always cry to me? I am only a rod and a whip of justice.' Yet the rod and the whip was as dry straw over against full hands. He was always with zealous words God's champion. He battled for Him with his tongue, and appeared as a sword of vengeance for the Almighty. When he restored the booty of his father, Jozabad, to those who had been wronged, his goodness was like the flower of the grass which perisheth in the night; it was like a net which the fowler spreads to ensnare the innocent doves."

"Sithri, thou art surely right," Jedidjah answered, "only tell me how I can try men's ways, and investigate their motives. Is it possible for me to look through a transparent little window into my friend's heart? I have looked upon Mattan with the eyes of a man, and therefore his deeds have pleased me. If I were to consider every man with suspicion, then all whom at morning I had looked upon as angels, at evening would appear as devils; then my friends would decrease,

and my enemies increase day by day, until finally I should sit alone like a pelican in the wilderness."

"Pardon me, my master and friend," replied Sithri, "I will teach thee how to distinguish among men those who go in the right way from those who walk in the crooked path. God be thanked! there never yet failed in Judea a righteous people, who through evil and good walked in the path of virtue. Go, gaze upon our king in his splendor. Majesty and mildness beam from his countenance. He appears to all the righteous as a fountain of grace, but to the wicked he is like the wrath of God. Behold Ben-Amos and the other prophets of the Lord, are not the lustre and holy brightness of virtue displayed on their faces? Verily, these friends of the Almighty resemble the light of the sun in the heavens, which disseminates its golden light and friendly beams over all the buds and growing fruit, but consumes the dry grass with its scorching heat. How different is it with the wicked servants? They cover themselves with a hairy garment to deceive the unsuspicious, but the words of their mouths resemble the coals of the broom-plant, which distribute neither light nor heat, but only waste and scorch all that they surround."

"Behold," said Jedidjah, "thy teaching is good, but what can it avail us in our present condition? My eyes have been opened to see that the horrible disasters which, in his time, overtook Joram's house, were plotted by the wicked Mattan. Yet who knew of his sins, and who has repaid him for the service? Furthermore, who

kindled the fire in Joram's house? Naomi's sin is written down as a blemish upon her in the books of the elders, yet Mattan, while the evil spirit rested upon him, testified to her innocence. Whom shall we now believe? These matters are still very complicated, and who knows what has become of Naomi and her children?"

Sithri answered:

"God is the God of justice. If now He has begun to uncover the hidden matters, we will also trust Him to bring all to the light of day; that the shameful crookedness of the evil doers be exposed, and Naomi be reclaimed from disgrace and poverty. Such events, and many others of an entirely different character, occur in a great and prosperous city. However, I will praise and magnify God that my lot has fallen to me in a pleasant place, and that it has been vouchsafed to me to abide among the dwellers of Carmel; for now I abhor the clamor of the city, and the uproar of the mighty who ruin their friends behind their backs. But do thou, my friend, henceforth keep an observant eye upon those around thee, for thy trust in God is true and right, yet thy confidence in men is vain and foolish. May the Lord preserve thee from all evil, and evermore give thee peace."

Sithri ate and drank, then he betook himself to Jerusalem to the dwelling where he abode while his business detained him in that city.

Azrikam, Chepher and Bukjah had assembled in Karmi's wine-shop on the evening

before Mattan's house was consumed. Chepher and Bukjah said to Azrikam:

"After a little the tongues of fire will lick Mattan's dwelling. They will consume him, his wife and child, and all his household. No one will remain to breathe what has happened. This fire will throw much dust in the eyes of the elders in the gates. Therefore, hasten to release Achan from his dungeon, speak to him kindly and promise him all that is good: for if thou dost allow him to remain shut up in his cell—there will be a multitude of people publicly examined—the elders would come hither. These stories would cast a bad light on some of thy remaining actions, and thou wouldst have bitter experiences."

Azrikam hastened to follow their advice. He released Achan from his prison and endeavored through the gift of a little field and garden, to conciliate him. He also promised him many other good things, and restored him to his former office.

The elders made a long and careful investigation. They re-examined Chepher, Bukjah, Achan, Helah and a host of other people regarding the evil deeds which had happened, aforetime, in Joram's house; but none of them varied a tithe from the declarations which had been made formerly, for each feared for his own safety.

Then the judges with one voice, declared:

"It cannot be otherwise. Naomi must have been associated with Mattan in order to execute vengeance on Hagith, for they both hated her."

They restored to Azrikam all his father's treasures which had been found in Mattan's house. Mattan's name, however, was cursed.

The unhappy Naomi heard on all sides the calumnies and disgraceful stories with which her name and memory were connected. So she continued to remain in an obscure and strange place where no one knew her, and passed among the poor people where she dwelt as a Philistine woman.

CHAPTER XII

Mother and Son

ITHRI, previous to his return to Carmel, spoke to Amnon as follows:

"I am greatly rejoiced to see thee strong and well in Jedidjah's house, where thou art loved and honored."

Amnon said:

"But what can all this benefit me, while I am a person without a name?"

Thereupon Sithri replied:

"Make a name for thyself through wisdom, industry, and knowledge. Meanwhile hold thyself in readiness for the third day from this, when my brother Abisai will come hither to speak with thee."

Then Sithri wished him peace and went his way.

Amnon abode again, as formerly, in the upper chamber, with Pura, his boy, secure from any anticipation of evil. But this boy was continually on the lookout for an opportunity to steal Hananel's ring, but found it impossible to accomplish his purpose as Amnon never removed the ring from his hand. Maacah meanwhile had no further commissions from Zimri regarding her mistress.

Shortly after, Amnon, while reposing on his

bed at night, heard a knock at his door. He sprang up in alarm and asked:

"Who calls me in the night-time?"

Then he recognized the voice of Abisai, who answered:

"Open thy door to me, Amnon!"

He opened it and his hoary-headed foster-father entered.

Amnon lighted a lamp, and asked:

"My lord, what dost thou seek from me at this hour?"

"Dress thyself and follow me," replied Abisai.

Amnon hastened to obey. Then they went together toward the Valley Gate. When they reached it, Abisai said:

"Stand still and listen to my words. I have heard that thou lamentest thy lowly birth."

Amnon answered:

"Truly, sir, my ignorance of my origin embitters my life, for I know neither my beginning nor my end."

Abisai continued:

"Swear to me that naught of what thine ears shall now hear shall pass thy lips."

Amnon replied:

"I swear to thee, my lord, that nothing which thou dost charge me to conceal shall be mentioned. God grant that thy words may bring comfort to my heart!"

Then Abisai led Amnon to a miserable hut. When they entered Amnon perceived a stately, handsome woman, sitting beside a rude little table, whereon stood a copper candlestick in which a

light was burning which illuminated her tearful countenance. A beautiful maiden sat at her side, who rose as the two men entered. Amnon stood in silence, wondering what sort of secret was to be revealed to him.

Then Abisai said to him:

"Step forward and kiss the hands of this woman for she is thy mother, and thou shouldst also love this maiden for she is thy twin sister."

When Amnon heard this his heart seemed about to break, but the woman began to weep aloud. She stepped to Amnon, embraced and kissed him, and cried:

"O thou son of my sorrows, thou who hast never known me since the day when I weaned thee!"

The maiden also looked lovingly upon him, and with tearful eyes, said:

"Thou art Amnon whose name I have so often heard from my mother, and of whom I have many times thought, although I had never known him."

Abisai had withdrawn himself while the woman made herself known to her son. She spoke again:

"God bless thee and be gracious unto thee, my dear son; yet why art thou so confused and so silent?"

Then Amnon fell first on his mother's neck, then on his sister's. Tears streamed down his cheeks, but he could find no words.

The woman spoke again:

"Let me hear the words of thy mouth that I may enjoy them."

Finally Amnon exclaimed amidst sobs:

"O my mother! thy ceaseless love, thy kisses, the fulness of mercy which for long years have been withheld, now all at once poured out upon me overcame my weak heart which is too narrow to contain them, and stunned me like a blow so that I could not speak. My mother, how lovely thou art, and how beautiful art thou, my sister! It appears to me that I find you like homeless people in so poor a hut. O speak, dear mother! why hast thou for so long a time remained a stranger to me? What is thine and my sister's name? What is our family and our father's house in Judea? O know, my mother, that until now I have vainly endeavored to obtain honor and name for myself, for I am always counted among the low-born, and all my affections and hopes have come to naught. Tell me also why thou art in poverty and destitution, that I may understand it. For is my hand too weak to aid thee, and can I not rescue thee from need and distress? Behold, Jedidjah has offered me an inheritance because I saved the life of his daughter which I have hitherto refused, but now I will accept the reward of my deed from him in order to nourish you thereon."

Then his mother said:

"Only one thing, my son, will I entreat from thee. Be not indiscreet and do not seek after the name and descent of thy father. Only this much can I impart to thee at this time. Thy father was of noble birth and is now dead. After his death the creditors, whom he owed, came and took everything away. If I had not fled with you,

my beloved ones, they would have taken us away and sold us as slaves. Even now I fear them, for they know no mercy. Is not this enough for thee, that this destiny still hourly awaits us should our hiding-place be discovered? Therefore, I shall hide our name and position in the depths of my heart, until the day comes when the Lord shall again turn His face upon thee. Now I have seen that God has already begun to let His favor again shine upon thy father's house when He has brought thee from the sheep-fold into the house of a prince, and has given thee there name and position."

Amnon sighed over these words of his mother, and weeping, said:

"Know that my name and rank in Jedidjah's house do but increase my pain and sorrow, for my desire is far above me. O, if I had never left the sheep-fold I might now live in joy and peace."

His mother asked:

"What aileth thee, my son, and what is the wish which is so far above thee?"

Amnon could no longer restrain himself.

"See this ring on my hand—Thamar, Jedidjah's daughter, gave it to me as the pledge of her love, and my soul cleaves to her even though hopelessly."

The mother noticed the ring, and looked therefrom on her daughter and on Amnon. The maiden was astonished, for she naturally thought of the ring which Theman had given her on Mt. Carmel.

When his mother asked Amnon concerning the signification of the names inscribed in the ring, he related to her all that he knew thereof. She said to him:

"Be calm and trust in God."

Then she talked of many things, and conversed freely with her son who had been found again, until the morning-light began to break and the new day streamed in through the low window. Then Naomi embraced her children, kissed them, and said:

"May your light break forth like the sun in the heavens at morning. God grant that my eyes may yet behold it, and my heart rejoice thereat."

Amnon embraced his mother and sister once more, and asked:

"May I visit you again?"

His mother replied:

"If I wish to speak to thee I will send to thee Uz, the servant of our benefactor Abisai, who will tell thee of the appointed place whither thou shalt come; but, my son, whenever thou comest to us, carefully conceal the tread of thy feet and the words of thy mouth so that no meddler ascertains thy way."

Amnon departed from his mother with a heart in which deep sorrow and exultant joy disputed possession.

Pura, who had watched all his master's movements, rejoiced over the events of this night, for they seemed to him remarkable enough to be reported. Therefore he sneaked behind when Amnon and Abisai had gone a little distance, and

followed their steps until they reached the Valley Gate. When he saw them enter the hut he quickly hastened back, for he thought if Amnon soon returned home and found him absent from the dwelling, he might have some suspicion. The next morning he went early to Azrikam, and related all he had seen.

Azrikam treated him harshly, and said:

"Thou hast acted foolishly. Why didst thou not seek to look through the window of the hut, then you could have arrived at the bottom of the matter. Henceforth watch carefully over Amnon's ways, and observe all his actions, for the matter is of great importance."

CHAPTER XIII

The Council of the Ungodly

ACHAN, one day, said to his wife:

"See, the Lord has fearfully punished the sin of Mattan, who persuaded us to acts of wickedness. The judge's horrible end disturbs my mind by day and by night. It makes me fearful, for I know the Lord will not leave us unpunished. Therefore, listen to the plan which I have devised to bring back Joram's banished family to their inheritance."

Helah, the Gentile woman, would not permit him to proceed further. She cried reproachfully:

"Thou wilt certainly deprive our son of his inheritance, now when he has just begun to show favor towards thee!"

Achan sought to quiet her. "Only listen first," said he, "to what I say unto thee, afterwards thou mayest conclude that I have rightly planned to bring back the banished, and thereby exalt the reputation of our son. Our mistress, Naomi, has a daughter, a maiden. I have never seen one so beautiful, and so fine in figure. Therefore I am certain that as soon as Azrikam beholds her, he will with his whole heart endeavor to obtain possession of her. I will now hunt up Naomi and relate all to her—how Mattan, in

order to revenge himself upon Hagith, fired Joram's house; how he, on account of his fear of my watchfulness, revealed his whole scheme to me, and how I allowed my son to escape and passed him off as Azrikam. Then I will endeavor to persuade her to give her daughter to Azrikam for a wife, and they will dwell peacefully on her father's inheritance. No one will have cause for the least suspicion. The most they will say will be: 'Azrikam has married a Gentile woman from the Philistines.' "

"But what will Jedidjah say regarding it?" inquired Helah, "for it is well known that he will never consent to Azrikam's having another wife besides Thamar."

"Listen, and attend to what I say to thee," replied Achan. "Zimri has confided to me that Hananel's ring is on the hand of Amnon, the shepherd, whom Jedidjah received into his house, and that Thamar loves him. Now, I will disclose to that youth the secret that Hananel is still alive. When Amnon learns this, he will immediately set forth for Assyria. I sincerely believe he will find Hananel and bring him back from imprisonment. Amnon's appearance so strikingly resembles that of the youth whom Hananel saw in his vision, that when he looks upon Amnon, he will say: 'Now is my dream fulfilled,' and Thamar will belong to the shepherd. The daughter of our mistress Naomi will also become our son's wife. Thereby our guilt will be removed from us, and atonement made for our evil deeds."

Then Helah said to him:

"Thou art walking on a slippery path, guard thy feet lest thou fall."

"Fear not, my wife," said Achan, "allow me to carry out my schemes."

"Will not the youth," said Helah, "be afraid to go into a country where the heathen dwell and war rages, and will he not thus going alone put himself in danger?"

"I know a merchant from Sidon named Adoram, who is stopping here at present," said Achan. "It is everywhere known that Tyre and Sidon are at peace with all the nations. They navigate all waters, and maintain traffic on the land, and no war among other peoples hinders their journeyings. Amnon can accompany Adoram, who will pass him off as a Sidonian, and thus preserve his life. I know certainly that Amnon will not be afraid of this journey, because he, as Zimri told me, loves Thamar like a bond-slave. Azrikam shall not know one word of this until Amnon has accomplished the deed. Then when our son perceives that Thamar's heart and hand are forever lost to him, and is mourning over it, I will show him Naomi's daughter in all her pride and beauty. His heart will long after her, and all the more when I reveal to him the fact of her being Joram's daughter; but he is my son, for I will not forever conceal my deed nor his origin from him."

After these words of her husband, Helah said:

"Thy plans are too high for me, and I can not understand them; for that reason I can say

only one thing to thee: Consider well thy way lest thou fall into the pit."

Zimri, on the same day, ordered Pura to go to the Valley Gate and ascertain who lived in the hut which Amnon had visited. Pura went there, found an entrance and went in. There he saw the old woman with her beautiful daughter.

He asked the woman:

"Tell me did not Shaef, the Moabitess woman, formerly live here?"

The woman replied:

"I do not know!"

Pura went out thinking within himself:

"Now the matter is plain. Amnon has a love affair with the pretty maid." He also visited the poor people of the neighborhood, and inquired about the two women. They told him they knew nothing, save that a Philistine woman and daughter dwelt in the hut. Thereupon he hastened to Zimri, whom he found in Karmi's wine-shop, and related to him what he had ascertained.

Zimri took him into a secluded room, and handing him a bag, said to him:

"Thou hast here thirty silver shekels, and thou shalt receive as many more when thou shalt have accomplished the commission which I now give thee. Go to Theman, and whisper in his ear: 'Last night Amnon stole secretly out of his house. I followed him at a distance to spy out his ways. I saw him enter the hut of two women, where he remained until morning. Therefore, I came to impart to thee that Amnon's behavior is evil.' But thou must at the same time enjoin

Theman that he tell no one whence he received this information."

Pura said to Zimri:

"Trust my cleverness, for I know how to measure my words. Now I will immediately carry out thy orders."

Zimri said:

"Yet wait one or two days; perhaps, meantime, thou wilt learn more concerning this matter, so that thus we may be able to effect our measures with wisdom and circumspection."

"Let it be so," was Pura's reply. "I will direct all my actions in accordance with thy words."

On the following afternoon Uz came to Amnon, called him out, and said:

"Prepare thyself and go this evening at sunset to the Vale of Tophet, there thou must wait at the appointed spot under the lindens."

Amnon said:

"Good, I will do as thou hast said."

Pura, however, who had hidden behind the door, heard this conversation. He went again to relate all to Zimri, who said:

"Now hasten to Theman and acquaint him with all that thou knowest."

Pura lost no time in obeying this command.

Zimri thought within himself:

"At last I have found something with which to destroy the friendship between Theman and Amnon. Henceforth Theman will perceive Amnon's faults, and will no longer consider him a pious and virtuous youth."

Amnon waited until evening, and then went to the appointed place under the lindens in the Vale of Tophet. Behold, there stood his mother and his sister clothed in dark garments and veiled. He was filled with joy and courage, for the day before he had learned from Achan that Hananel still lived. He had also conferred with Adoram, and had made preparations for starting on the journey. Therefore, he rejoiced to see them once more before he started for Assyria.

He, however, quickly became sorrowful when he saw how greatly disturbed and cast-down his mother appeared. She also had learned startling news from Achan's mouth, which had greatly distressed her heart. His sister, if one could judge from her countenance, knew nothing of what had happened.

"Shall I from thee, and thou from me always abide apart? If so, then my heart will break," were her first words to her brother. Naomi wept when she heard her daughter's words.

Amnon said:

"I pray thee, dear mother, weep not and do not embitter this moment. Thy grief makes my heart grow heavy. Tell me instead, the name of my pretty sister."

The mother asked:

"Will it make thy heart lighter if I tell thee she is called Susanna?"

Amnon cried:

"O Susanna, my little rose! The name seems to me the noblest jewel in the crown."

The mother went on:

"Know, my son, that in these last days our

situation has greatly changed. Deep secrets have been revealed to me. I have learned what I never thought to know. Perhaps, at some time, the day will come when these shall be revealed to thee also, and thou wilt strike thy hands together in astonishment. I will now impart to thee that thou canst not see us again for many long days, for we are about to leave the city to dwell in another place until a certain time."

Then Amnon said:

"I, also, shall in a few days start on a long journey, for I too have heard incredible things. I have been told that Hananel, Thirza's father, whom we all thought dead, still lives. Therefore, the ring which Thamar gave me is now a more valuable treasure, for I now confidently hope that Hananel's dream will be fulfilled. I have already seen even with my own eyes, that much of it has come to pass. See, my figure is similar to that of the youth whom Hananel saw in the dream. Thamar loves me. I saved her life. She gave me this ring pregnant with fate, and my descent is hidden. If now all these signs have already appeared, may I not hope for the future?"

But his mother said:

"Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust in Him. He will guide thee and lead thee to thy aims. And who knows? Perhaps God will soon remember me in mercy, and no longer allow me to wander about the country like a beggar-woman."

And Naomi wept bitterly.

Amnon further told his mother how he had associated himself with a Sidonian merchant, a

Gentile, with whom he was to make the journey to Assyria. He kissed her and his sister; then they embraced him with kisses, and separated. Amnon went in one direction back to the city, the two women taking another way.

As Naomi and Penina went forward, they met Theman. Penina knew him at once and wished to retreat, but as soon as Theman perceived her, he exclaimed in surprise:

"O Heaven! my eyes behold the little rose of Carmel!"

But Penina remained silent.

Theman said to her:

"Thou surely art the Susanna whom I saw on Mt. Carmel, who kindled the flame of love in my heart, and then vanished like a beautiful vision."

Penina stood still, gazing first upon her mother then again upon Theman, without speaking.

Theman continued:

"O lovely Susanna, give me back that which thou hast taken from me, give again rest to my soul and peace to my heart. For see! only for a moment did thine eyes make me bold, and thy gaze promise me the fulfillment of my highest wish, and yet through long, long days, thou didst deprive me of rest and peace. Therefore come with me, I will take thee to my father's house and say to him: 'This one is my eternal rest, and my soul longeth alone after her!' O listen to me, for if thou dost deny my petition, I shall die in the flower of my youth."

Then Naomi said to him:

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"Urge her no further, O son of a prince, and cease longer to lift up thine eyes to this maiden, a stranger to thee, for she is promised to another man."

Then Theman said:

"Thou art certainly her mother who sent me an answer by an old woman, that the sapphire was broken from the ring, and now again thou sayest to me that thy daughter is betrothed. Now then, who is the man who has found this treasure, and to whom is it to belong? Why does he not clothe her in embroidered garments as becomes a king's daughter? Truly, he must be a needy man! Call this poor man to me, and I will give him silver and gold in abundance, for I am the sole heir of Jedidjah, the Mild. I know the man will rejoice over the price which I shall give him, but I will rejoice over thy daughter on whom my whole life depends."

Naomi said:

"Art thou not contented with the honor and riches which God has allotted to thee, and wilt thou grant nothing to a poor man? O conquer thyself, thou son of a prince."

But Theman cried:

"O Susanna, turn to me!"

Her mother lifted up her voice again:

"Cease, O prince's son, to speak unto my daughter words which she does not understand. Susanna is not her name. So go back to Carmel and seek there the Susanna who had won thy heart, or what is better, go to thy house, lie down on thine ear and sleep a while, then when thou shalt awake, thy dream will disappear."

Theman answered:

"If I really have dreamed, then I have dreamed alone of the love of thy daughter, for the image of the lovely Susanna has followed me by day and by night for a whole year."

The woman answered:

"Pardon me, my lord, thou who fanciest such a little rose—thou wilt yet see more beautiful maidens and they will all appear as roses to thee, because thou seekest roses; and who can restrain thee from plucking them where thou findest them, and there are thousands of this kind in Zion; go thither and gather them."

Then Theman addressed Penina:

"Thou also dissemblest before me and art silent, and dost treat me as a stranger. O, has God richly blessed thee with beauty and amiability, while thy heart is full of deceit and falsehood! O, no, He has not made thee bashful, and created thee simply to be loved as an image. Look in my eyes and speak freely and openly. Hast thou truly never before seen me, and didst thou not once on Mt. Carmel accept a ring from my hand? Know then, I will not depart from this spot until thou hast told me why the sapphire was broken from the ring. Yet another request: O point out to me the fortunate man to whom thou art betrothed, that I may know the extent of my misfortune."

Tears flowed from Penina's eyes as she answered:

"Address thyself to my mother, for I belong to her and must behave as seems good in her eyes."

"O son of a nobleman," said Naomi, "would that thy trust in me were as great as thy love to my daughter. Believe me! my daughter will give thee an answer in three days. But I now charge thee by the roes and hinds of the fields to relate our conversation to no person."

Theman answered:

"I swear it to thee by my life, and by the still more precious life of thy daughter."

Penina added to her mother's words:

"So go hence, my lord, in peace, and trust in my words. I swear to thee by God above there shall be an answer on the third day."

Theman went away from the women, saying to himself:

"It cannot be otherwise, Amnon must have seen this maiden and he loves her, for it is impossible that a man should behold her and not desire her. It will, therefore, be best for me to encourage Amnon to obtain Thamar, and also to turn my parents' hearts from Azrikam, for Amnon will never take another wife beside my sister. Nevertheless, I will wait until the third day for all this, for even if her lips did speak otherwise, her glance showed me that her heart was not averse to me. I will hear first what kind of an answer she will give me, and afterwards act accordingly."

Amnon sat in his upper chamber, and his mind was distracted. A great obstacle must still be overcome, for even if his journey proved successful he knew not how great would be the price to be paid for Hananel's release, nor how he should procure the greater part of the money.

Finally he determined on the next morning to acquaint Thamar with his intended journey to Assyria, and of the difficulties in his way. She would advise him and perhaps furnish him with the needed means. He waited till morning, then he went to Thamar and told her there was a secret which he wished to talk over with her, and asked her to meet him at a designated place on the Mount of Olives. When the day was declining Amnon waited for his friend at the spot already agreed upon. It was in a thick grove behind her father's summer house.

The sun went down, the moon rose slowly in the heavens, yet Thamar came not. Then Amnon took his knife and cut both their names in the bark of a tree. While he was thus occupied the expected one appeared.

When she perceived the inscription, she asked:

"Were not our names long since engraven in God's handwriting on the tables of our hearts?"

Amnon answered:

"They shall also remain here together. May our love grow and blossom in our youth and bear fruit in our old age like this olive-tree. It shall be an emblem of our love, and its branches shall shelter it. But now, listen, thou faithful and only one! I will uncover hidden matters and relate to thee wonders which thou hast never thought to hear. Still press me not with questions and ask not after the fountain of all which I shall reveal to thee. It rests upon strict truth, and my words are without deceit, then perhaps from this a beam of hope may shine forth upon us."

"Be it far from me," said Thamar, "to oppose thy wish, or to doubt thy word."

"Therefore, listen my love," continued Amnon, "and be amazed: Hananel lives! To-morrow evening, in company with a Sidonian merchant, I shall start on a journey to Assyria, in order to release thy grandfather from his captivity."

When Thamar heard this, her heart seemed about to break from joyful surprise. She grasped Amnon's hand, and asked:

"Can I hear all this at once and not be beside myself?"

Amnon continued:

"Know then, thou beloved of my soul, I shall not see thee again until I have carried out my project and fulfilled my mission Now, entreat thy father to give me a thousand silver shekels, to serve me as ransom money for Hananel. Yet conceal from him the true foundation of the matter. Tell him I have changed my mind, and am now ready to receive from him a gift of money as a reward for thy rescue. I know he will deny thee nothing."

Thamar began to weep. Amnon, too, could not restrain his tears, yet he sought to encourage her.

"Hope for the day of my return, my true love!"

He lifted up his eyes to the sun, whose declining beams were gilding the distant mountains, and exclaimed:

"Thou lovely sun of the heavens, delay thy setting and be a witness of our covenant. Conceal our plans for a little, but when the right hour

comes then pour thy beams on all our deeds. Then all our friends shall walk in our light, and praise the Lord God, the Creator, who has also created love."

Thamar lifted up her hands, and cried:

"I invoke the gentle moon to witness, and I swear to thee yet again that I am thine, forever thine." Clasping Amnon's hand, she continued: "Guard this ring with all diligence!"

Amnon replied:

"I will guard it with all diligence, and cherish it as the apple of mine eye. It is the source and the expression of our love, and the dearest treasure of my life."

Afterwards they remained silent for a long time. Finally Thamar spoke:

"Let us return, for it is late. To-morrow I will obtain from my father the sum which thou needest. To-day I can fulfill thy wish no more because my heart is full to overflowing with the unexpected message of joy which I have received, and also of anxiety for thee. O thou, my only love, how shall I endure the long time of thy absence? Every day of thy journey will seem to me like a year."

While they were thus conversing, Jedidjah had come upon the scene so quietly that they had not observed him until he suddenly stepped before them out of the bushes, and exclaimed:

"Hey! hey! what a wonderfully beautiful picture. Here I find a young man hand in hand with a strange maid."

Amnon and Thamar were frightened beyond measure before him, and could make no reply.

Jedidjah stood still and watched the two. Then perceiving Hananel's ring on Amnon's hand, he stepped to the youth, and with shaking head took the jewel from his finger without a word. Amnon and Thamar were speechless and as if palsy-stricken. Jedidjah let his gaze rest upon them for a while, and then said:

"You both should be ashamed, and blush for your disgrace. What shall I say of my daughter? She is like a misled dove which goes innocently into the enemy's snare, but I direct my words to thee, Amnon. Is this thy faithfulness to me? Is this thy innocence before God? Lo! I wished to give the ransom-money for my daughter Thamar, whose life thou saved, and thou didst turn away thy hand and refuse to accept it. But what thou now desirest is altogether too great, for thou dost demand soul for soul, and life for life. Now cease to disturb my daughter, for I say to thee it is in vain and will not make thee happy. Seek a wife for thyself from among the women of thine own standing in Jerusalem and in Judea, but leave Thamar alone, for I have not designed her for thee, neither hath the Lord God intended her for thee. Now go, return to thy resting-place, but thou shalt never see Thamar again."

Thereupon Jedidjah took his daughter by the hand and led her to her mother, to whom he related all his eyes had beheld. He concluded with the words:

"This is thy fault, Thirza. Why hast thou distracted our child's head with dreams and idle talk? Therefore now procure a remedy for thy folly."

Amnon returned to his room bowed down with shame, and bitter sorrow overcame him, for all his plans and hopes appeared to him to have been destroyed at once, and he sat the whole night through upon his bed filled with grief and apprehension.

Zimri, who kept a watchful eye upon all that happened in Jedidjah's house, noticed that Thamar wept in secret and Theman went about full of disquiet. Maacah had imparted the cause of Thamar's grief to him, and Pura had also related to him that Amnon passed sleepless nights and was weary and depressed by day; then he went to Azrikam and said to him:

"The little fishes are all caught and are struggling in my net."

CHAPTER XIV

A Prince's Displeasure

THEMAN hastened at the appointed time on the third day to the designated spot, and waited there impatiently. He looked longingly for the friend of his heart, yet in vain. While he thus tarried, a boy approached him, and said:

"Who art thou, sir?"

Theman answered:

"What business hast thou to transact with me, that thou thus inquirest of me?"

The boy said:

"I am seeking a prince's son who should be here, therefore, I pray thee, my lord, tell me thy name."

Theman replied:

"I am the son of Jedidjah, the Mild."

When the boy heard this name, he took from his bosom a sealed letter, which he delivered to Theman, saying:

"Yesterday morning a strange maiden gave me this letter, paid me money, and said: 'Carry this to-morrow morning to the lindens in the Vale of Tophet, and deliver it to the son of Jedidjah, the Mild, whom you will find there.' I took the letter from her hand, and have brought it to thee, my lord."

Theman opened the letter and read as follows:

"Thou hast gone astray, my lord, with the words of thy mouth, nevertheless, thine eyes have not deceived thee. Thine eyes recognized me, but thy lips did not call me by my right name. I am truly she whom thou seekest, but I was not called Susanna on the day of my birth. Pardon me, my lord, for having deceived thee twice. On Carmel I withheld my true name from thee, and in Zion lied to thee. Even now I can only reveal to thee the feelings of my heart; my name and abode I must continue to withhold. When I told thee on Mt. Carmel that my name was Susanna, I knew no other love save that of my mother, who is dearer to me than the apple of my eye. I loved and honored her and nothing troubled me. Then I saw thee and must have loved thee against my will. Since that time all my rest is over. Before I saw thee I was an innocent little lamb, a child, but when thou gazed upon me with thy flaming eyes I awoke to womanhood. Thou didst aim well and thy words reached the inmost recesses of a heart hitherto closed. Now my soul knows how unhappy it is. Hardly had I lifted up my eyes to gaze upon thee, before I said to myself: 'Look not upon the sun for it is high above thee, thou wilt only be consumed by the glare of its beams and darkness will overshadow thine heart.' My friend, give me, give back to thy Susanna, thy little rose, the morning-dew of her youth which thou hast taken from her! Give her back the purity of her heart, her peace and innocence. Why dost thou envy

her? O, let the rose bloom in the desert quiet and unmolested. Turn away from her, thou darling of my soul, for thorns surround Susanna and if thou wilt pluck her thy hands will bleed; and even if thou didst obtain the rose its purity would melt away in thy hands, or a fierce wind would sweep it out of thy grasp. Therefore, depart from me, my lord. O let my soul be precious in thy sight, the soul which longs and yet dreads to behold thee. May I appear to thee as a lovely vision of the night which vanishes with the day-break. Be thou to me as an angel of the Lord who has descended from heaven to kindle the sacred fire around the sacrificial lamb, and again vanishes. I am the whole burnt-offering which must be utterly consumed upon the altar. Do thou pour thy tears thereon as an oblation. Behold, that is the Susanna whom thou hast chosen, and this is her destiny. Her eyes have beheld her desire, but she must fly away and conceal herself. Also thou, my lord, this be thy favor and the fruit of my love—conceal all, as thou hast sworn to me. Have pity upon an unfortunate, troubled soul, forget her and think of her only as a dear lost one! Present thy love to a more fortunate one than she."

When Theman had read this letter, he clasped his hands together in astonishment and perplexity, and cried:

"O languishing soul! O broken heart! O thou my beloved Susanna! Thy words are a riddle to me, just as thy love appears to me as a wonder. I see that thy heart is set upon me. Who then is in our way? O Susanna, thou hast

rent my heart, and who will heal its wounds? If thou art unfortunate, am I not even a thousand times more so? I have seen thee but twice, yet I shall never forget thee to eternity."

When the boy who had brought the letter saw that it made Theman sad instead of happy, he said:

"Now all my hope is vain, for I thought to receive a large reward from thee for the message which I delivered, but now I perceive that my reward is lost."

"Point out to me the abode of the maiden," said Theman, "then thou shalt prove the generosity of my hand."

The boy answered:

"Sir, how shall I point out her dwelling to thee for I have never yet seen her face, for she had scarcely spoken thy name when I joyfully thought, now there will be a good reward for me because thou art the son of the Mild."

Theman charged him:

"Keep silence towards every one, come to my house and I will reward thee."

The boy departed, but Theman turned homeward with a sorrowful heart, thinking to himself:

"I will rise early to-morrow, go to Amnon and investigate this matter. I will also ask Sithri for he dwells in Carmel. From these two I can certainly learn something of the women."

* * *

Amnon sat in his room now nearly desperate and vainly seeking to find some way out of his afflictions. He sighed and said:

"O woe be upon the third day for which I hoped! It is dark to me and has brought me shame instead of honor, and woeful pains instead of love. Now my rival Azrikam will be elated and will exalt his head over me. Woe is me! how can I permit my love to be given to another. O God! whither shall I go with my ignominy? There remains to me no other consolation save to hasten away into hopeless exile."

All these thoughts bowed down his soul into the dust, and he wept bitterly.

Night came and the noise of the city gradually subsided, still there was no quiet in his soul; his agitation increased more and more, for his thoughts continually reverted to Thamar who was lost to him.

While he was thus musing, Jedidjah entered with a bag of silver in his hand. Amnon rose up in affright.

Jedidjah said to him:

"Send thy boy away from here."

Pura went out and ran to Zimri, for he was afraid to hide himself behind the door lest Jedidjah should open it suddenly and discover him.

Jedidjah fastened his eyes upon Amnon, and noticing how flushed his countenance was from weeping, said:

"Thou weepest, Amnon. Thou doest well thus to take it to heart, for thou hast returned evil to me and hast also been unfaithful while I trusted thee. Still I have not come hither to multiply words. I have not now come to discourse to thee of honesty and good manners, since thou hast not learned these from the sons

of the prophets. But one thing do I require of thee at this moment, be truthful and honest with me on account of the favor which I intended to bestow upon thee. Has Thamar really formed an everlasting covenant of love with thee?"

Amnon answered:

"It is verily so, my lord. It happened a year ago, on the anniversary of the day when I saved her life at Bethlehem. Nevertheless, thou didst yesterday take away from me the token of the covenant which thy daughter gave me."

"I am pleased to learn the truth without tedious delay. Now tell me, Amnon, what course wilt thou take when the father breaks the bond which thou hast formed with Thamar?" questioned Jedidjah.

Amnon answered:

"I shall go about my whole life long in pain and sorrow. I shall walk my way alone, for I will never seek another companion. This I have sworn, and I shall keep my oath."

To this Jedidjah replied:

"Behold! Thamar has a father; herein lies thy guilt that thou didst not think of him."

Amnon retorted:

"The lion, however, did not think of him when he lay in wait for thy daughter's life."

Jedidjah replied:

"Thou hast saved Thamar's life only, and thou dost ask as price therefor her life and her honor besides. However, Thamar's honor belongs to me, and she shall give it to no one without my consent. O that ere now my eyes had been opened to thy conduct. If now thou dost not wish to

make me thy perpetual enemy, take this purse; it contains a thousand silver shekels, they are thy reward. Thou mayest also keep Hananel's ring, which Thamar gave thee in token of her covenant, as a memorial of thy folly. For as after Hananel's death his ring has no value, so also thy love to my daughter is alike vain and worthless. Now take these and depart before day-break, and be no longer a stumbling block to my daughter. Behold, I have warned thee."

He did not wait for Amnon's reply, but laid the purse and the ring on the table and departed.

When Amnon perceived how Jedidjah's anger had resulted to his own assistance, his courage rose. He took the purse with the silver shekels together with Hananel's ring, placed the lion's skin on his horse's back and rode to Adoram.

Pura returned to Amnon's room which he found empty. He remained there over night. The next morning he hastened to Zimri. The latter said:

"I have seen Jedidjah and already know that Amnon has taken his departure, never to return."

"Where is my reward?" demanded Pura.

"Only be quiet, Pura," said Zimri, "there will speedily be another commission for thee, then thou shalt receive thy reward."

* * *

Three days elapsed since Amnon's departure from Zion. When Azrikam learned that Jedidjah had returned Hananel's ring to his rival as an ut-

terly worthless and insignificant token, and in addition had presented him a purse of silver, he was confounded. He secretly consulted with Zimri regarding the measures to be taken, for he saw plainly that his object must be accomplished before Amnon brought the old Hananel from his captivity.

Zimri advised him as follows:

"Urge Jedidjah to give thee speedily Thamar as thy wife; I will meanwhile, through Maacah, calumniate Amnon to Thamar. Maacah is in love with the youth, and has always cherished the hope of obtaining him should he be rejected by Thamar."

Azrikam replied:

"Thy counsel is good."

He then went to Jedidjah, whom he met at the foot of the Mount of Olives, and said to him:

"How long shall thy daughter continue to mock me, turn away from me, and disregard the covenant which thou didst form with my father?"

Jedidjah replied:

"Am I not the man who concluded the covenant with thy father? Art thou not Joram's son, and is not Thamar my daughter? Who will break this three-fold cord? Therefore, Azrikam, cease to fear, go to thy bride, speak to her according to the promptings of thy heart, for she will now talk with thee in a different tone than formerly."

"God grant," said Azrikam, "that Thamar has changed her mind, and may love me as much as she formerly hated me."

Jedidjah answered:

"I have already told thee I am Thamar's father, and she will comply with my wishes."

The two men then separated. Jedidjah went to the city, while Azrikam ascended the Mount of Olives and betook himself to Jedidjah's summer-house.

When he came to Thamar he found her sunk in deep thought, sad and discouraged. As soon as she saw him she turned her face away, and looked out of the window near which she sat. Azrikam said to Maacah:

"Leave the room, for I have something to say to Thamar."

But the latter cried:

"Remain here, Maacah, for I have no secrets with Azrikam."

"Aye," said Azrikam, "it has come to pass on this day when secrets have been revealed, that what was openly declared must become a secret."

Thamar inquired:

"What is this day above others, that Azrikam should become wise and discourse in profound proverbs?"

Azrikam answered:

"My heart has acquired much wisdom since thine went astray in crooked ways."

"My heart," said Thamar, "has not strayed nor wandered from the right way whither my understanding led, and it is as impossible for a fool to overtake it as for a horse to overtake the hind which flees away in the valley."

Azrikam replied:

"Yet the swiftest hind will not outrun the disobedient maiden, who runs after her lover against the will of her parents, neither will she obtain the wind-bag who chases after the east wind."

"Was I not right?" said Thamar, addressing herself to Maacah. "To-day Azrikam has appropriated to himself a language so abounding in imagery, that even the preachers of repentance in the gates need not be ashamed to use it. What a pity he lavishes his fine speeches on a maiden who will not listen!"

Azrikam continued:

"I have deceived myself in thee for there is only one whom thou wilt obey in secret, but if thou hadst listened to the words which I spoke to thee, both secretly and in public, I would willingly have obtained for thee a thousand babblers, no one of whom would have been less worthless than he to whom thou hast presented thy heart."

"Perfectly right," said Thamar, "verily, thou art a prince over a thousand. Still, if thy hand is able to acquire and to buy, go, obtain understanding and a heart, for the fool lacks heart and his mouth is useless. He who has little intelligence, should not open his mouth widely. How long, Azrikam, wilt thou boast of thy descent and riches? Know that riches and descent grope in the darkness and seldom find the man whom they seek. If the light of truth were to beam on their paths, we should behold new and wonderful things. Then we should see those who now hide themselves in costly garments, deprived of their ornaments and going naked; and those who now

go naked would be clothed, and the proud would bow down before them. There is this proverb concerning honor and riches: 'Riches are as suitable for fools as is snow in summer, and honor is to them like rain in harvest time.' Remember still, Azrikam, that silver and gold are procured from the earth, and the man who glories alone in these clings to the dust. Thamar will not contaminate herself with this dust, therefore she will never pledge herself to such a man."

Azrikam was unable longer to restrain himself, his anger burned within him, and he said:

"I have not allowed myself to argue with thee, because I plainly saw that thou hadst become too wise for me. Thou hast had for so long a time thy teacher before thine eyes, that now all thy words and sayings are used only to bring down the lofty and elevate the lowly, for such wisdom was agreeable to thy teacher and thou dost now love to imitate him in all things, that thou mayest always become more worthy of him. Yet this will not continue longer, because thou wilt have to obey thy father's command. Then thy witticisms will come to an end, and thou wilt cease to expound and criticise."

Thamar, overflowing with anger at these words, rose up to leave the room, but she said to Maacah:

"Send this prince out of my sight, he must quickly depart, for if I continue to gaze longer upon his detested countenance it will only increase my hatred." Then she went away.

Azrikam departed gnashing his teeth. He betook himself, in bitter wrath, to the city in order

to seek Jedidjah, and when he found him he thus spoke:

"Truly, Thamar has indeed now spoken to me in another tone, but ah! her tongue is as sharp as a keen knife, and I am weary hearing her abusive words. They are, however, the fruits of the kindness which thou hast lavished upon the shepherd. Now cure her disobedience and bend her stubbornness if thou canst."

Jedidjah answered:

"Thou, Azrikam, art also over-hasty in thy deeds, therefore be not too rash with thy tongue. I will have a serious talk with her, and then she will certainly make peace with thee. Be patient for a little, and let thy future remain quiet in my hands. When Thamar becomes eighteen years old I will grant thy wish."

* * *

When the noon-time arrived and Jedidjah sat at the dinner table, Thirza came from her apartment and seated herself at her husband's right hand, while Theman and Thamar sat at his left. Theman was absorbed in thought, and Thamar wore a sad countenance. Jedidjah noticed this during the meal, yet said nothing. But after the repast was concluded, he said angrily to Theman and Thamar:

"I am now disgusted because you eat your bread with sadness, and sit at my table with unhappy faces to my discomfort. Therefore, do not appear before me until you have learned to mend your ways."

Thirza said to him:

"Be not angry, my husband, and if my soul is precious in thy sight speak no harsh words."

Jedidjah answered:

"Thou knowest I love thee, and that thy soul is dear to me. Once I gave much of my wealth for it. Now, the times are sadly changed. Men without money and property win a maiden's heart, and before they seek her have already found her."

"My husband bear in mind the olden times," said Thirza. "What did Adam give for his wife, Eve? Naught, save a rib from his side. Remember also the words of Ben-Amos: 'Seven women will at that time take hold of one man and say, we will nourish and clothe ourselves, only let us be called after thy name.' Lo, a new time has now arisen, and the maidens begin to seek the men."

"Woe be to these times," sighed Jedidjah, "woe to these days which have come upon our houses and palaces; woe that their influence is apparent on one of our children, whose mind is estranged from her parents, and who has gone astray seeking the desires of her own heart. Only ask thy daughter, she will teach thee the character and knowledge of this day."

Tears flowed in torrents down Thamar's cheeks as she heard her father utter these harsh words. Jedidjah turned to Thirza, and continued:

"Think not in thine heart that she repents over her deeds. No, she only weeps on account

of her Amnon. For this reason she has to-day heaped shame and disgrace upon the son of a prince. Pay no attention to her sorrow, for her tears are like the morning-dew which is quickly dried, and which disappears so soon as the sun rises. But do thou, my daughter, also cease to grieve over thy friend, for he has been driven away and will never return. Weep not over him but instead over thine own disobedient spirit and the shame of thy youth. Know, and also observe, that Azrikam nevertheless still loves thee. Now, thou shalt be ashamed of thyself for seven days, and thou shalt be corrected and come to the knowledge that thou hast grievously sinned in that thou hast given thy heart to a strange youth without the consent and knowledge of thy parents. Therefore, thou shalt not behold my face for seven days, until thou hast repented of thy disobedience." Then he banished Thamar from his presence, and she went out weeping bitterly.

When Theman also had left the room, Thirza said to Jedidjah:

"Recollect, my husband, to whom thou hast thus spoken; Thamar is our only daughter, why wilt thou embitter her life?"

"It is thus, as I have already declared," Jedidjah replied. "Upon thee, Thirza, rests the burden of guilt and the mischief done, for it seems just and right in thine eyes that she despises the son of a prince, the son of my friend Joram, with whom I made the covenant, and chooses a strange low-born youth. I must acknowledge him to be amiable, intelligent and handsome; yet how shall

I address him: sir, prince or nobleman? He is a child without a name, and I know not at all what to call him. I beseech thee, Thirza, speak a word in season and show me what I should do. For see, Thamar is blossoming like a rose, and the time will come when she can no longer be deprived of her lover."

Then Thirza replied:

"Thou carest only for the parents and descent of a bridegroom, but thou dost not take Thamar's heart into consideration. My father did not act thus, for when he promised me to thee he asked only after the purity of thy heart. I also never asked after thine origin and descent. I only beheld, learned to know thee, loved thee, and became thy wife. Afterwards I learned thy descent for the first time. Dost thou not know, my spouse, that a rose will often flourish in a dry, sandy soil, while thorns and thistles thrive and prosper in the Eden of Carmel and the gardens of Sharon?"

Thereupon Jedidjah said:

"Listen, my love, I well know what encourages thee to speak thus to me. Thou art always dwelling upon the tales of thy father Hananel, and thou dost behold in Amnon the youth who appeared to him in dreams. If thy father were still living I would give Amnon all the goods of my house and send him to Assyria to release him, but thou hast thyself seen the end of all these day-dreams, for Hananel is dead. Therefore consent and counsel Thamar to place her affection again upon Azrikam."

Thirza answered:
"I will do as thou hast requested me."

* * *

Maacah conversed with Thamar, and said:
"Behold, my mistress, all has come to pass as I foretold thee. I have ever pointed out to thee how unfortunate Amnon is, that he is unstable and unambitious, and have told thee thou couldst not return his love without disgracing both thy parents and thyself. O thou misguided one, why dost thou cling so obstinately to a love for which thou must suffer shame and disgrace? Why dost thou reject Azrikam whose reputation in thy father's house is so great? His wealth is immense, and all that he possesses will, ere long, be thine. What can Amnon, on the contrary, offer thee? Only his heart alone, for he possesses naught besides. O, my mistress, it pains me sorely to see thee sad and sorrowful, and to know how thine own father has driven thee, covered with shame and disgrace, from his presence."

"Would that my father," exclaimed Thamar, "had driven me forever from his house, then would I leave my luxurious apartments to hasten to Amnon to whom my whole soul cleaves. It would be sweet and pleasant to dwell with him in a shepherd's hut, for it would become a king's palace if I were under the shadow of its roof with him. Should he lead me into the wilderness I would follow him with joyful confidence, for lovely flowers spring up beneath his footsteps, and at the sound of his voice the barren wastes are

made to sing. I, who have never desired riches, nor sought after honor, have often said to myself: O, if I were a king's daughter, then for the first time should I be worthy of him; O, if I possessed all the gold of Ophir and were the most beautiful of women, even then I should be found wanting in the beauty and goodness which abides in Amnon. Truly, he gives me naught save his heart alone, but this gift is more precious than all the treasures of earth, and more glorious than all the pleasures of the sons of men."

Maacah replied:

"His remarkable beauty attracted me likewise at first, but when I saw him more frequently, he appeared to me like all the youths of Zion. Even so, if thou canst accustom thyself to Azrikam and soon forget Amnon, I now advise thee to take the latter course. Forget him, for he will never return again."

While they were thus talking Thirza entered, and said to Thamar:

"What answer wilt thou give thy father? He will remain firm, and will never depart from his determination."

Thamar answered:

"I am in my father's hands, and he may do as he pleases with me. He may bind my hands with cords and sell me to a tyrant and I will make no outcry, but know, mother, he can surrender only my body to him whom I detest, but my soul will go free, and neither with a silver nor a gold bridle will he be able to prevent it from flying to Amnon. I belong to him, and I will die with him."

Thirza sighed.

"Thou art my only one, Thamar, and how much sorrow have I already endured on thy account." So saying, she went away to repeat Thamar's words to Jedidjah.

The seven days of Thamar's disgrace had passed, yet her father had received no answer from her. One day he said to her:

"Prepare thyself, my daughter, to greet Azrikam as thy suitor. In ten months thou wilt be eighteen years old. Then I shall give thee to him as wife, even if it be against thy will."

Thamar was silent, but she wept and moaned in secret.

* * *

Theman one day sought Thamar, and having sent Maacah away, said to his sister:

"Incline thine ear unto me, and listen to the words which I shall speak unto thee. I swear to thee there is no guile nor deceit on my lips."

"My brother," was her reply, "I know and have confidence in thy truthfulness, therefore speak, I am listening."

"Thou knowest, my sister," proceeded Theman, "that I love Amnon as a friend, yea, as a brother, and that I hate Azrikam. Now, Amnon on the morrow after that day when our father surprised thee, suddenly disappeared and no one knows where he abides. Thou also, my sister, hast received no tidings from him, therefore listen and understand how great is man's deceitfulness. There came a man from Gilead in Benjamin, who related the following story to me. He said: 'I

went up to Jerusalem to present myself before the face of the Lord at the Passover. There I saw a wonderfully beautiful maiden, the daughter of a poor man, who was dead. Her mother is a Philistine woman. My soul longed after the maiden, so I went to her hut which is near the Valley Gate and asked her to become my wife. She consented. I gave her the bridal-presents, and said to her: 'Remain here a month until I divide my father's inheritance with my brothers, then I will return here to take thee back with me as my wife.' The maiden agreed to all this. When I arranged to return home, I sent my boy back to live in a dwelling near her, that during my absence he might keep an eye on her movements to see if she were honorable. When the month had elapsed I returned to Jerusalem, but I could find no trace of the maiden. My boy told me he had seen a youth with wonderfully handsome eyes visit her in the hut by night, and remain there until the morning-star arose. He then left the hut, went toward thy father's house, and entered therein.' Pura has also confided to me that Amnon verily was absent from his room at night, and returned towards morning. Had I not ascertained these and some other things besides concerning Amnon, I should have considered the man who related the tale and also Pura to be liars, but to my sorrow I found they told the truth. I am as certain about it as if I had seen it all with my own eyes. Should our father change his mind and consent to give thee to Amnon as his wife, be on thy guard, my sister, that he take no other wife besides thee; and if he has already taken another, then our father

shall command him to put her away and give her a bill of divorce before he may carry thee home."

Thamar was surprised at her brother's words and her heart beat loudly, yet she concealed her perplexity, and said:

"My brother, be not like a fool who believes every falsehood. A thousand men will lie, but Amnon will never break his troth; therefore, cease annoying me. If my father would only break through the partition-wall which he has erected between Amnon and myself, I would then laugh at thy words."

Yet she remembered what he said, and pondered it in her heart.

When Jedidjah perceived that Thamar still remained unfriendly to Azrikam, he ceased his urging and left her to herself. However, he said to Thirza:

"Let us see to whom God has allotted our daughter."

CHAPTER XV

Nineveh of the Gentiles

THREE months had passed since Amnon's departure, and no one knew what had become of him.

Thamar was accustomed every morning, soon after she had arisen, to go into her father's vineyard. One morning as she thus went, a man from Sidon approached her, and said:

"Art thou Thamar, the daughter of Jedidjah, the Mild?"

"I am she," answered Thamar.

The Sidonian said:

"Give me the reward which belongs to the messenger, then thou shalt receive from me the letter which a youth named Amnon sends thee from Assyria."

"Come again later in the day," said Thamar, "then thou shalt receive thy reward."

The Sidonian replied:

"I believe thy words because thou art the daughter of 'the Mild,' and thou wilt not deprive me of my reward." Thereupon he handed her the letter, and went away. Thamar's heart beat violently as she opened the letter.

These are the words of Amnon's letter to his beloved Thamar:

"From the land of Nimrod, from Nineveh, that great city mighty in people, I send thee this letter. Rise up, thou prince's daughter, and attend to the words of Amnon, which he sends thee from a distant land.

"I loved thee at Bethlehem, thou wast my choicest jewel in Zion, and also at this end of the world thou art my true love. While I am far from thee, O thou, my fountain of life, thy lovely image accompanies me; it hovers about me alike in my waking hours and in my dreams. It guides and has led me in all my ways; whether sitting or standing, whether coming or going, thou art the sole object of all my desires. Thou didst take me from being a shepherd of the sheep, led me to Zion, and enabled me to live there in honor. Thou didst bring me into thine apartments that I might behold the glory of thy countenance, and learn the graciousness of thy presence. Yet that was not sufficient for thee, thou didst increase thy favor and didst give hope to my heart; with a gentle spirit thou gavest me good will, love and tenderness. I have compared thee to the morning star. I saw thy favor high as heaven above me, while I myself was humble and lowly. Then my courage failed. I said to my dreams: 'Ye are vain!' and to my hope: 'Thou deceiver!' for I feared thy father's wrath. Now, that which I feared has come to pass, for thy father has fallen upon me. He has heaped reproaches upon me, and abusively driven me from his threshold. However, he returned to me the ring, which is precious above all to me, and he also gave me a thousand silver shekels. Verily thou dost know to what

use I shall put them. If I had only found him whom I seek, I would have ransomed him and have brought him to thee, and said to thee: 'Here is the fulfillment of the dreams, and now I shall be betrothed to thee for all eternity.' Then thy parents would have said: 'Amnon hath done great things.'

"I tarry at Nineveh, which is a mighty city of the Lord, in the land of Assyria. The country is fruitful, and richly blest in corn, rye and wine, and the heaven's deep dew. Now, open thy heart, then I will tell thee of the city of Nineveh, about which great and incredulous things are reported.

"God created the mountains, but men erect strongholds wherein to conceal themselves. However, the city of Nineveh has stood since the earliest ages, like a little sister to the great mountains which God made. Assur built it, and in order to glorify the name of his son Nin, called it Nineveh. It lies on both sides of the Tigris, and is surrounded by a high, firm wall, a three days' journey in circumference. Canals and channels for water are so numerous that Nineveh may be compared to a ditch full of water.

"Here is the picture of this ancient city, and thou canst hardly compare the young, tender daughter of Zion with her. Behold her rivers are not like Siloam, for God has poured over the latter a soft shimmer, while a dazzling light is reflected from the rivers of Nineveh. Its waters do not reflect the picture of a happy throng, for they are muddy and are intermingled with the tears of the oppressed and enslaved of all nations, who are borne thereon in boats and canoes. The

mountains of Nineveh do not resemble Mount Moriah or the Mount of Olives which glow with holy splendor, for they smoke and send forth flames that burn unto the ends of the earth. Zion is the dwelling-place of the eternal God, while Nineveh is full of idol-worship; and in her temples are winged oxen with human faces, a horror to pious men. Nineveh resembles a panther whose spotted skin renders it attractive, but whose roaring is terrible and whose teeth are as destructive as a two-edged sword. In this city Sennacherib, the king, arms himself; he ascends like a lion from the Jordan, lays waste land and destroys what is therein; he empties the dwellings of Kedar and Dumah, and crushes the dwellers of the Sephanim. Again he holds his hands outstretched for he will lift up his standards against Zion, for he desires to seat himself on the Holy Hill; he wishes to see how the kings of the East and the West will bow their necks under his feet. His legions are fearful and horrible, and the mightiest heroes will lose courage when they see his horsemen with their fiery steeds and their coats of mail. The snorting of these horses is like the sound of the waters of the Tigris in time of flood; the earth trembles under the stamping of their hoofs; all the strong men grow pale at their neighing, for it is louder than thunder. They roar like young lions; they snort and snuff with rage; they rejoice in the prospect of battle. They pile up mountains of dead bodies; the slain fall like sheaves under the hands of the reaper, and the captives are more than the sands of the sea.

"When the sun goes down and the moon

pours its light over the Tigris, then I stand on the heights and gaze from thence over the broad land. O moon, thou who goest forth in light and glory, how lovely thou wert to me when I saw thee in the Sanctuary. When I stood on the Mount of Olives and thy light, which glistened like silver, broke through the branches of the trees and thou didst reveal Thamar's pure, lily-like figure with thine enchanting radiance as she stood by me, then thou didst illuminate her white hand as she lifted it up to thee when she swore to me an oath of eternal faithfulness. How soft and lovely did thy glimmer appear to me then! Yet thy brightness, O moon, is deceitful! Thamar called on thee to be a faithful witness to our covenant, yet that very evening thou didst already prove faithless to her, for by thy beams I saw tears on her cheeks. Now thou hast already renewed thy youth three times, but to me thou hast given no new and constant spirit; yet thou hast prepared for me months of fruitless work, and many miserable nights. Aroused by thy beams, dreams come to me with their confused forms and figures; they dance about me, they seduce me and lead into error. I am their plaything until the morning breaks, and in awakening I find that I have been deceived.

"The day flees away like chaff, as the wind, passes the evening. Behold, it is midnight! All men lie dreaming under the wings of night and the pinions of profound slumber, which loosen all the fetters of the weary day-time. The bowed-down and oppressed, whose days are filled with darkness, refresh themselves in its arms, but I

find neither sleep nor slumber. I recline upon the lion's skin, while thought upon thought crowds upon me. A stormy sea, upon whose waves and billows my poor heart will be cast, foams in my breast. Then I sit bent over this leaf, while sleep flies from my eye-lids. Yet, what then robs me of slumber? The stars overhead wander quietly and peacefully in their courses, and gaze down upon the silent earth. Why is there no rest nor quiet for me? O, had I the wings of a dove I would fly to thee to rest in thy dear presence, if only for a moment! Yet alas! I should find in thy features the reflection of my own soul, for if thou wert happy and contented then the storm would not rage in my breast, and my heart and my limbs would not tremble with forebodings. For this have I proved and found to be true while I yet dwelt in thy father's house, that there were many times when as I sat there in my chamber, a sudden joy would penetrate my heart, for whose ground and reason I could not account; but afterwards when I came to thee, I found thee also gay and happy. Again, my mind would be often gloomy, I knew not why, and when I came to thee, behold, thy soul likewise was troubled. One day I imparted these coincidences to thee, and thou with a happy laugh didst thus explain the mystery: 'Knowest thou not, my friend, that when we entered into the covenant of love, my soul became a part of thine, and thine a part of mine? Therefore the one must share in all the happiness of the other, and the sorrow of the one the other must endure.' I kept these dear words of thine in my heart and found thee to be right,

for my soul loves those whom thou dost love, and detests those whom thou dost hate.

"Verily, my sweetheart, it is thus in true love—two souls and one thought, two hearts and one burden—therefore should I not tremble for thee when my soul shudders? What is the trouble with thee, O Thamar, my little dove? Has thy father reproached thee? Has Azrikam annoyed thee? Art thou grieving after thine Amnon? Yet I will not point out again the tokens of unhappiness. May no sorrow come upon thee, no pain touch thee, and if they have already overtaken thee, may they vanish like clouds before the light of thy countenance; for the light of thine eyes is a well of life and mercy for the oppressed and suffering. I pray daily to our God to put upon me all the evil instead of on thee, for I will bear and endure all without murmuring.

"How many endure far greater pains than I; therefore, my heart, be still; for I hear heartrending cries, loud voices in strange tongues, a tumult when the shrieks resound in the stillness of the night. Alas, it is the moan of the captives who have been dragged hither, and who lament in the streets of Nineveh. My own heart moans with these oppressed ones, and their cries mingle with my own. Verily it is as if the Lord had descended from heaven as in the olden times at Babel, to confuse the languages again in Nineveh, for the tongues of all nations resound here.

"Many lament in rough voices like the growling of bears, and sigh: 'O misery! we have been captured and robbed!' Meanwhile, their oppressors rejoice and shout in savage glee:

'Aha! aha! we have entangled and destroyed them.' There are those who curse the day, and rage and tear their hair, and cry: 'O misfortune, upon misfortune.' The victors, however, rejoice, they anoint themselves as for a holiday, and shout exultingly. Yes, here the eye beholds horrors, and the ear hears troubles and confusion. Here are people who speak all sorts of unknown languages. Some mourn with heavy hearts, and howl and cry in the language of Egypt. Others curse and lament in the tongues of Kedar, Arabia and Dumah. Then I reflect on Jerusalem and shudder, and on Thamar, until my heart is near breaking. But then I recall myself, question myself and say: 'What avail the people's cry and the noise of the kingdoms of the cruel Gentiles? They are like a swarm of ants on a clod of earth; before the voice of Jacob they would all flee, and be dumb forevermore.'

"These thoughts oppress me throughout the night, and my soul wanders from the one to the other. Will this night endure forever, and will the day never come? Depart from me, ye deceitful forms, for ye are born of the darkness, while my soul longs for the light!

"I open my window, and behold, the daylight illumines the heights of Nineveh. The birds of heaven lift up their voices and praise the Lord with the morning-star, then my heart also becomes joyful. It sings and unites in the universal song of praise. O would that this time of awakening were longer, for it is so delightful. Yet behold! the whole East already clothes itself in purple; after a while the sun, like a flame of fire,

shines from the mountain-tops. How gloriously it gilds the peaks, and how wonderfully it beams upon the Tigris, the river which flows from Eden! The sun arises in its splendor and disperses the darkness to the ends of the seas. All that have wings and move in the air, rejoice and sing; yea, all creatures rejoice, because the light has conquered the darkness. The sun rejoices as a strong man to run a race, and it shines until noon-day. Then it stands weary midway in the heavens. The birds cease their singing, one's gaze gradually becomes weaker, the shadows grow longer, and the day declines. Such also is the career of men on the earth, and such also are the stages of his life, for they decline towards evening like the sun in its course. How lovely is the morning-dew of his childhood, and how sweet is the light of his youth. Then all darkness flees from him, and sweet hope hovers about him and sings like a nightingale in his ears. Yet alas! hope accompanies him only to the middle of his life. She comforts him at first like a mother, but in his old age she forsakes him and, behold, the man goes like a shadow to decay. Only the memory of his beautiful youth accompanies him throughout his whole life, for all in which he found pleasure gradually departs from him, and nothing except darkness and loneliness remain in his heart.

"Still, when I speak of hope, my soul becomes exasperated. Dost thou still, Thamar, my heart's friend, remember how one spring day I sat with thee in thy father's house, and with thy lovely mouth thou didst say to me: 'Hope, Amnon, for hope is life!' Truly, hope is sweet, and

glows in the heart of the oppressed like a rainbow on a cloudy day; men believe therein for a little while, yet behold, all its consolation is vain; it is like the foam which rises on the water, and disappears in a moment. It stands on a peaceful day like a firm tower and a strong bulwark, but when a stormy day full of disaster suddenly dawns, its pillars begin to totter and it is like a falling wall and a broken defense. Dost thou remember, Thamar, that evening of the highest happiness of love, and of the most terrible fear? Then we were suddenly separated and our hope vanished away. After passing a sleepless night and a restless morning, my hope returned but her path was hidden from me. I arose, followed its direction, came hither, and am again comfortless.

"Already for the fifth time, the great light which rules the day has crowned the heights and mountains of Nineveh, yet it has never shone on me to crown my labors with success. My eyes wander in the streets and lanes of this city, but my soul longs after Jerusalem, the fountain of all my hopes. Yet the more my soul reaches after it the more violently is it driven back, for yonder is truly also the scene of my terror. My soul resembles a wave which noisily strikes on the rocky shore, but quickly rebounds from the force of its shock. Many times I tarry in my thoughts, under the shades of that olive tree on whose bark our names are inscribed, on that spot where our souls were also united. 'Hope,' I say then to my soul, 'for a hope yet remains!' Although the mountains lift up their summits between us, they cannot separate us; and all the waters of the

Tigris, the Euphrates, the Jordan, and every other river cannot extinguish the flame of our love. Thy voice yet echoes in my ears, and I perceive how thy rosy lips move in order to say to me from afar: 'I am thine forever!' Thus I think and reflect, and hope bears me aloft on the wings of love. But there the understanding again steps in and says: 'Thou foolish dove, why wilt thou fly up to heaven? See, there above only the falcon hovers and the eagles circle; abide thou in thy hiding-place and conceal thyself in the cleft of the rock, where thou wilt dwell in safety. So listen to the voice of reason, for who would not obey her?' But as soon as I hear her voice my hope is lost. So my thoughts wander within me, and my soul resembles the river which flows from Eden, but always returns thither. My heart, my poor heart, is rent and tormented with these gloomy thoughts the whole day, for fears and hopes alternate in my mind so long as I think of thee, thou charming one.

"Dear one, thou who dwellest peacefully, wait for me a little while and give thy love to no other; shout to me with an exultant voice, and say: 'Hope, Amnon, for hope is life!' Say that to me, my dove, who art exalted on the heights of Zion, say that to me and I shall hear it in this distant land.

"Adoram, the merchant, now directs his steps to Medea, and oh, I hope there yonder to find him whom I seek. O that these days of my wanderings might end like a tale that is told! O that a hand from above might seize me by the hair of my head, and bear me away from these

flaming mountains to the peaceful heights of Zion. O could I now fall asleep and be permitted to gaze on thy image!

"The words of Amnon are ended."

When Thamar had read this letter, she kissed it. Her soul overflowed with joy, and she said:

"What man understands love like Amnon, and from whose mouth flow such tender words? Truly, his love is like a flame of the Lord and his words burning coals. How different am I; for when deep and beautiful thoughts fill my heart I cannot give expression to them, for words and the art of speech fail me. My soul seeks my beloved, without speech or sound. More than a thousand words could not express the slightest emotion which my soul cherishes towards Amnon. Yet why need my lips seek after words? What my heart thinks speaks ever to Amnon."

Thus Thamar rejoiced in the joy of her heart; then she remembered what Theman had said to her and she was suddenly frightened; yet she soon grew brave again, and said:

"All men may be liars, but Amnon will never break his faith with Thamar."

Thamar read the letter a second and a third time, when she found this sentence which she did not rightly understand: "Thou wilt love whom my soul loves." She asked herself with a beating heart: "What does that mean? Has Theman spoken truly of thee, my Amnon? No, for if thy heart were as broad as the ocean, my love would fill it completely and no room would be left therein for another. Verily, Amnon, has a stranger stolen thine heart? My bosom burns

when I think of it. Then woe to me, and woe to the other! My love is strong as death, but my jealousy is deep as hell. I will drive away the stranger before the storm of my rage like chaff before the wind, and I will destroy her, for Amnon's whole heart belongs to me and I will share it with no other. Yet why should I torment and afflict myself? My fear is verily false and groundless, and such evil will not befall me."

While she thus communed with herself her maid, Maacah, entered, and asked:

"Why art thou so absorbed in thought, my mistress?"

Thamar replied:

"Counsel me how to prove a man's heart, in order to ascertain whether he be faithful."

Maacah said:

"That is a very easy matter. If he lifts up his eyes to another woman then he is unfaithful to his beloved, and if he speaks kindly to another woman he is treacherous to his sweetheart."

"Thou art right," said Thamar, "we will speak further on this matter at some other time. Now I will impart a secret to thee."

"Well, my mistress," answered Maacah, "I am ready to listen and to perform whatever thou mayest command."

CHAPTER XVI

A City Divided

And in that day did the Lord God of hosts call to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness and to girding with sackcloth.

And behold joy and gladness, slaying oxen, and killing sheep, eating flesh and drinking wine, let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we shall die.

—Isaiah, xxii, 12-13.

THE City of God trembled and quaked because it was feared that Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, would lift up his hand against her, for his deeds were incredible and one day related them to another. The children of Zion were therefore horrified when they heard of his prowess.

Thamar strolled in the garden praying to God early and late to deal kindly with Amnon, and bring him back with a faithful heart. But the secret which Theman had imparted to her concerning Amnon burdened her, so, in order to relieve herself, she imparted it to Maacah and also read to her Amnon's letter. Maacah, however, sought to fan the coals of jealousy, which slumbered in her bosom, into glowing flames.

Then Thamar instructed her maid to pretend to make love to Pura, and to win his friendship with deceit and thereby learn all Amnon's secrets from his lips. Maacah was not negligent in obeying the commands of her mistress, for she thought to herself: "If Amnon were expelled and ban-

ished from Thamar's presence, and were he again poor as formerly, then he might look upon me." So she went to Zimri and consulted with him as to what she would do. Zimri instructed her in the craftiness of his heart, and sent her to Azrikam to say that he should expect him in the morning.

The morning broke, and it became full day. The children of Zion arose, left their couches and thronged the halls of the Gates where the princes and the king's counsellors were assembled, consulting in a secret session regarding what should be done in the city; and how, in case of attack, they should best guard and protect themselves behind their walls and fortresses. But the people floated to and fro in the streets, with a buzzing like that of a swarm of locusts. Some paced up and down the streets unceasingly, in order to obtain the news quickly, and puffing like dragons. Others again stood in groups talking foolishly. Those who while on their couches had devised false reports, could now easily dispose of their lies for good money. They stood at the street-corners and on the crowded squares, and offered their knowledge for wine and strong drink.

Here one stood in the centre of a crowd and exhorted the people to quietness, saying:

"Behold, our king has sent ambassadors to Mizraim to ask help and support from Pharaoh, for he lives at peace with our people and will not turn his face from our messengers."

Then another cried in opposition:

"How can the Egyptians help us! They are

only proud braggarts, sitting at home drinking their Nile water."

A traveler lately returned from the Euphrates stood in another place and gathered about him a small crowd, to whom he spoke as follows:

"The ways have become desolate and unsafe for the traveler, because the lion with his brood has come out of his den. He and his hosts have fallen upon the people. The sons of Assyria and Elam are marching under his flags, and Rabsaka, the crafty, has been appointed over them. The great king of Assyria is as strong as the cedars of Lebanon; he is like a mighty tree which spreads abroad its boughs from the Tigris to the Euphrates, and extends its branches to the Western Sea. Behold! he already lies before Charchemish, the strong city which is built at the junction of the Chebar and the Euphrates. Even this strong fortress is only a scorn to him, but the strongholds of Judea will fall into his mouth like ripe figs. After a while he will strike over the Euphrates, and a little later over the Jordan."

Those who heard these words trembled and were greatly troubled. They sighed and lamented over and over again, saying, "How fearful! Fearful! Who will remain safe in Zion?"

Chepher and Bukjah were in the throng, and Chepher said sneeringly:

"Come, let us bring wine and drink."

"Well said," Bukjah rejoined, "he that has money should open his hand and give him to drink who has little, for as you have already

heard, very shortly men will cast their silver and gold into the street and no one will pick it up. Therefore, ye men of Judea, let us flood our throats with the blood of the grapes before the enemy bathe his feet in our own blood."

One of the crowd exclaimed:

"Hold thy tongue and be silent, thou glutton! Ben-Amos and the princes and kings are holding a council over this matter." Then the crowd dispersed.

Bukjah, however, said to Chepher:

"What avails all this foolish talk? Come, brother, let us go to Karmi and have a drink."

Now Karmi was a genuine hypocrite. He carried himself with the pious and also before the eyes of the world as a righteous man, but secretly he was the accomplice of all sorts of rogues. Even before the eyes of robbers and godless men he assumed the appearance of holiness and had an excuse ready for all his actions, and firmly asserted that no one could draw him into sin. When he saw something evil he appeared not to notice it; when he heard the blasphemy of the mockers he pretended deafness. He gave his wine not only for money, but also, without making much inquiry, for gifts from vile women and the booty of thieves. These things he exchanged through his friends for money. In these ways he filled the corners of his house with gold, and became rich in all good things. His house was the resort of bad men whose evil deeds had not yet been brought to light. Notwithstanding these things, Karmi went daily up to the Temple to worship

before the Lord, and walked among the pious as a virtuous man.

Azrikam and Zimri, as they had agreed, came to this shop early in the morning. They seated themselves in a dark back room, and Karmi brought them wine. Then Azrikam asked:

"Hast thou really good news in store for me?"

Zimri answered:

"Thou verily knowest that thy welfare is the object of all my wishes. Despair not concerning Thamar, for I still have hope for thee. Know then: Amnon has written Thamar a letter filled with love and ardent desire. This letter Thamar read to her maid Maacah, who has reported all to me. Then I taught the latter to devise deceit, to spin falsehoods wherewith the sweetness of Amnon's words should be turned into wormwood to her mistress. Maacah was delighted with the words which I put into her mouth to fan Thamar's jealousy. They succeeded so well that her mistress ordered Maacah to feign love for Pura, and enter into a covenant with him to spy out Amnon's secrets. Pura is faithful to us. We have disturbed Thamar and made her believe that Amnon loves another. Jealousy now burns in her heart."

Azrikam replied:

"Thy words agree with what I already know. Listen to what I have learned. Thamar is not mistaken, for Amnon really loves another maiden. This is true, for I have the intelligence from Achan, who said to me yesterday as I sat sorrowful in my room: 'How long, my lord, wilt

thou grieve over Thamar, who distracts thee? Is she, indeed, the only one in Zion?' When I replied: 'She is the only one for Amnon, and I cannot consent that she should be given to him.' He continued: 'She is not the only one for Amnon, for he has discovered another far more beautiful than she, and he will not relinquish this new love, not for seven Thamars. However, the maiden is poor, and therefore Amnon endeavors to obtain money to free Hananel from captivity. I counsel thee, therefore, to anticipate him and to marry this beautiful maiden before he returns, for I know that thou, when thou dost behold her, will at once and forever forget Thamar.' When I asked where was the dwelling of this beautiful one he said to me: 'Thou mayest see her after ten days, for at this moment she abides with her mother on the borders of Judea.' "

When Azrikam finished, Zimri said:

"The matter appears very singular to me. Whence does Achan derive all this information? Be it as it may to him, he can mean only the maiden who dwells at the Valley Gate, and she is precisely the one to whom Theman's heart cleaves with hopeless love; for since the day when he met her in the Vale of Tophet he has gone around like his own shadow. It appears to me as if Lilith has here laid her poisonous egg from which in time an adder will come forth for the destruction of Amnon, Thamar and Theman. If Amnon would only return, I would make him unhappy and utterly dispirited. Heigho! already new plans are working in my head, yet for all this

we must wait for the arrival of the maiden and for Amnon's return."

While they thus conversed Chepher and Bukjah noisily entered the wine-shop, and Chepher said to Karmi:

"We are to-day in bitterness of spirit, for we have listened to the speech of the people on the streets and have perceived that danger threatens us everywhere. We have resorted to thy house in order to drown our sorrow in the wine-cup."

Here Karmi, who esteemed Zimri a godly man and was unwilling to expose himself before him, rebuked Chepher and Bukjah. He said loudly so that Zimri might hear it in his corner:

"Be silent, for to-day is no time for mocking and evil jesting."

Then Chepher looked keenly at him, and asked in surprise:

"Why art thou so particular to-day? Hast thou called one of the preachers-of-repentance at the Gate into thy house, that he may expound to us the ten commandments regarding drink?"

Bukjah interrupted him:

"I will explain to thee the whole law of drink in a few words, thou villain! Now listen! When the cup is full the brain is empty, and the drunkard is a miserable fellow; when the cup is empty, the stomach is full, and the drunkard has a happy face. Do you understand?"

Karmi replied:

"Spare thy proverbs. Both of you sit down and drink your wine in peace and quietness."

Chepher continued:

"It is certainly so. Karmi has concealed a preacher-of-repentance somewhere within his four walls. Well, now, we will seek the pious man. We must see who he is."

Thereupon he started to carry out his purpose, but Karmi held him back and whispered to the two men:

"Understand, Prince Azrikam and Zimri are here."

Bukjah had hardly heard these words before he cried with a loud voice:

"Ha! they are verily good friends and will certainly grant a morning-dram to poor wretches like us."

Azrikam heard these words, opened the door, and allowed the two eaves-droppers to enter. But Zimri sat there and gazed thoughtfully into the dark, flowing wine, which filled his glass. Then Chepher said to him:

"Verily, thou art wholly absorbed in thy wine. Thou dost well to seek in the juice of the grape for the thoughts which thou hast not found elsewhere, or, perhaps, thou wilt fish out something new which has never before been created from the bottom of thy glass."

"Thou mayest be right," answered Zimri, while he began to sip his wine with pleasure, "old things and new are hidden in its lovely redness. Still, all thoughts which spring from wine are useful and agreeable to the drinker, who keeps them to himself."

"A misguided spirit dwells in wine," rejoined Bukjah, "it works in secret but proclaims its deeds in the market place. It enters imper-

ceptibly, but scarcely has it passed down our throats before all the secrets within us obtain wings and flutter merrily from our tongues, for wine is of the devil."

Azrikam asked him:

"Dost thou conceal so many and so important secrets, that thou fearest they may become alarmed and fly like little birds out of their cage? Then one can give thee wine to drink until thou art full and burst like a leather-bottle, and all thy secrets become revealed."

"O, no, my lord," answered Bukjah, "I am certainly not so. True, I am very intimate with the cup and my soul cleaves to the drinking-vessel, but my mind is still firm and strong and knows how to be on its guard. Yet, now, enough of dry speech. What does it avail to the poor? The idle and the boasters are not good for much. Therefore, my lord, command Karmi to bring us wine, cider, or some other drink wherewith God has blessed his press, for we are bowed down with care, sorrow and old age; but a pitcher of wine will renew our youth and we shall be like the phœnix."

Then Azrikam said to Karmi:

"Bring wine, that we may drink."

Chepher added:

"He must also give us good measure. God save our good King Hezekiah. Since he sat on David's throne, our drink is no longer mixed with water. The cups are full and our stomachs have no lack. Early yesterday the king's civil officers searched again through the wine-taverns, and in that of Igharis, the Carmelite, they found cups

which were too small, and also corrupt, lifeless wine. Then they dashed the cups as one breaks an old kettle, into a thousand pieces, they put him in prison, and he must also pay a fine. Therefore, be careful, Karmi, that thy wine lacks nothing, or we shall beat thee and dash thy pitchers into fragments."

"Thou talkest excellently," said Karmi, "but watch that thou dost not fill thyself with storm and wind, for every wise man should be silent in these times."

Chepher, however, cried:

"Only hasten, thou looking-glass of virtue, to bring us something to drink before the Assyrians enter the land."

Karmi brought wine and presented it to them. They drank, caroused and became intoxicated. Then Bukjah sang a drinking song:

How rubicund our faces shine
  Red-tinted by the wine-cup's beam!
Ah, good and sweet is generous wine—
  Sweeter than honey does it seem.
  When the sparkling bubbles gleam
Away doth every burden roll,
Father Noah, from thy bowl.

Enough for us the bread of sorrow,—
  The head bowed down, the heavy sigh,—
If from the North ill comes to-morrow
  We'll eat and drink before we die,
  And drain the cup of pleasure dry,—
While the sparkling bubbles shine,
Father Noah, from thy wine.

When he had ceased singing, he continued: "I have always said: Whoever loves easy days should not grieve over the past, nor be anxious for the future. He should regard the days in which he lives. Let us eat and drink for to-morrow we die."

"The spirit of wine already rests upon thee," interrupted Chepher, "and what thou hast received from the new wine already flows from thy lips."

Bukjah rejoined:

"I only say what is true. Oh! if I were a preacher, in this time of distress who would not listen to me?"

"Yes, it is a time of confusion," said Karmi, "yet in the days of calamity we should not lose courage. Does not Zion still stand? Jerusalem is our stronghold and will protect our chief in the time of battle. Her walls are strong; her towers reach to the sky. The Assyrian hosts may indeed come hither, yet when they gaze on Zion's walls and battlements, they will be ashamed at the deeds of their heroes. Behold! our princes are in Zoan, and our messengers have gone to Mizraim to procure horses and chariots of war, and the fortress is full of weapons. We will keep up a good heart and hold our ground. We will hurl our spears, for we are warriors, and the Lord will strengthen our arm."

Zimri, who until now had sat sipping his wine in silence, addressed Karmi:

"Thy wine is truly not diluted with water, yet thy words are; they are idle wind. The fortress of Zion is in reality only a stronghold for

conies. They are a feeble folk like thee, and are heroes as long as they sit in their holes. They build their pits in the mud and fancy themselves strong and secure, but the lion treads unexpectedly upon them and their whole magnificence lies in ruins. Ye also, so long as ye sit behind full cups, are all heroes and proudly boast of unheard-of-deeds; still, how soon your lips become dumb when you see the glare of the weapons, and the glance of the spears, and when it is necessary to speak a little word with the enemy from behind walls and battlements. To whom do ye relate such things? Inquire rather of a man like me! I had the misery and unhappiness to behold them with my own eyes, for I dwelt in Samaria when Salmanasar besieged and captured the city. No! neither with idle words nor with boasting speeches can ye carry on war with the Assyrians."

Then Bukjah began to sob, and cried:

"Sennacherib has combatants of all nations under his banner; he has reaped the fruits of all lands and yet his soul is as insatiable as hell, and he is preparing to devour our peaceful dwellings. Is there then no vineyard in Assyria and no grapes, that he must come to obtain our wine? Verily, Assyria is like death, which is ever unsatisfied."

"Be quiet," exclaimed Zimri hotly. "We will not lose our courage. On the contrary, we will conclude a covenant with death that it spare us. Then the old wine will not be taken away from our mouths."

When Chepher heard these words, he said to his companions:

"The Lord do thus and so to me if this man goes one step away without disclosing to us all his secrets."

Thereupon he turned to Zimri with the words:

"Thou knowest more than thou wilt tell. Thou hast learned something in thy master's house, or somebody has whispered a little secret to thee. Share it with us that we may know it."

Zimri replied:

"Swear to me that what I reveal to you shall not be revealed until an appointed time."

"May the new wine," cried Bukjah, "become bitter, and the old turn into wormwood, if we betray one syllable of what thou dost confide to us."

Then Zimri said:

"Now I have confidence in you. So, listen my friends! I am really a Samaritan and have no inheritance in Zion, yet it pains me when I see the danger of the city. Vainly does Isaiah Ben-Amos comfort us with the fine words and learned speeches as a mother comforts her boy, or a nurse soothes a child with songs and stories. Let him who desires life hearken to the words of Sebna, the master of the treasury, and he will be saved, for Sebna strives after entirely different things and will proclaim liberty to all who will keep peace with the Assyrian king. Yet this is not the time, nor the place, to talk further concerning these matters. I have told you this in part, but you will understand and retain the information better when the wine has departed from you."

"Prosperity, peace and blessing accompany Sebna in all his ways and deeds!" cried Azrikam.

Zimri continued:

"We will hold ourselves in readiness for the day when we shall assemble in Sebna's house. He is an enemy to King Hezekiah, but until the matter becomes notorious, we will keep it to ourselves."

The traitors then swore to keep the matter secret. Afterwards Zimri hastened to the house of his master, Jedidjah, to attend to his work.

Azrikam, however, said to Chepher and Bukjah:

"I am still young, but you lived in the time of King Ahaz when our forefathers practised witchcraft, and consulted astrologers and fortune-tellers concerning the destinies of the people. Today we are like foxes in the clefts of the walls of Jerusalem. We grope in the darkness like the blind, and no one knows anything to which he can cling, for our eyes are directed solely to the prophecies of Ben-Amos. Oh! if now I knew a wizard or astrologer, I would reward him richly if I could learn from him the destiny of Jerusalem and the course of my own future."

Then Chepher said:

"My lord, listen to what chanced to me four months ago. At eventide I was going toward the Vale of Tophet, when I met a veiled woman and a maiden, more beautiful than I had ever seen before. I asked them whither they were going. The woman told me they had come from Beersheba, and were going up to Jerusalem. At the same time she asked me the way to the city,

which was new to her. But when I saw some one approaching us, I left the women, because I feared to excite suspicion if found with them. The women, however, vanished quickly like frightened roes among the willows. Since then I have often regretted leaving them, for I confidently believe they were witches."

"Search at once in the city," Azrikam said, "perhaps thou canst trace them. If thou dost find them, inform me."

After this conversation each returned to his own dwelling. Many thoughts raged and stormed in Azrikam's heart which he carefully concealed until a suitable opportunity came to reveal them.

CHAPTER XVII

The Captive's Return

TWO months had elapsed since Thamar received Amnon's letter. During this time she had no intelligence of his welfare. Every day when the morning-star appeared, she arose, went into her father's vineyard, and poured out her heart before the Lord. She besought God to protect Amnon, and return him faithful to his covenant.

When she stood one day at sunrise in the garden, Maacah came running, and while at some distance cried:

"Be not frightened, my mistress, Amnon and thy grandfather Hananel are in thy father's house. They have just arrived."

"Amnon! Hananel!" cried Thamar, trembling with joy. She hastened to the house, and stood there paralyzed before the scene which presented itself to her gaze:

Thirza, her mother, hung upon the neck of an old man, and cried over and over again:

"Father, my father, thou spring of my life."

Jedidjah stood before Amnon filled with astonishment, then extended his arms, and exclaimed:

"Wonder upon wonder! my eyes behold marvelous things that I never expected!"

Thamar was like one turned into stone, and knew not what to do. Theman and Zimri stood in the corner of the room, overtaken by surprise:

Thamar could no longer restrain herself, she cried:

"O joy! thou hast returned, thou, the apple of mine eye!"

Then Jedidjah took her by the hand, led her to Hananel, and said:

"My father, behold thy daughter, Thamar."

Hananel embraced Jedidjah and Thamar, and said:

"But now, my son, look upon this youth, my rescuer and the heir of all my possessions—upon Amnon, my son. O God! my dream has been fulfilled, not a word of it has failed. Amnon has done great things for thy daughter, great things for me; therefore, his honor shall be great."

"Truly," interrupted Thirza, "truly Amnon has done much for us, and we have caused him much sorrow. We should not delay to recompense him." And Thirza wept while speaking.

Jedidjah embraced Amnon, crying:

"Forgive me, my son, because I put thee to shame, but I misunderstood thy hidden ways and thine unknown purposes, which now only raise thee in my estimation. Approach Thamar and rejoice in her love, for behold the dream is fulfilled. Thou knowest I have made a covenant with Joram, my best friend, which I cannot break; therefore turn to my father, Hananel, for Thamar is his daughter, and ask from him thy friend's hand. He will grant thee thy greatest desire."

Thamar still remained standing like one in

a dream. Amnon stepped before her, and said:

"Wake up, thou sweetest one. Here stands thy father, Hananel. I have ransomed him, brought him back and now place him before thee."

Then Thamar awoke from her stupefaction, and said:

"O thou, my light and my salvation, thou hast turned the heart of the fathers to their children."

Hananel grasped Amnon's hand and declared in the presence of Jedidjah's household:

"All my treasures which I formerly had hidden in Samaria, have I transported hither on mules, nothing is lacking—but I have this day presented it to Amnon as ransom money for my life. I, myself, am now poor, but Amnon is one of the richest men in Jerusalem. Thamar is my daughter. What can I give him for the life which he has saved for her, and the favor which he has shown her? Therefore, my daughter, give thyself in hand and name to thy chosen one."

So saying, he took Thamar's hand, laid it in Amnon's, and proceeded:

"Behold, this is the youth with the handsome eyes, who has delivered me on account of his love for thee. His origin is obscure, but for thy sake his horn shall be exalted, for the valiant soul which dwells in him is more than ancestral glory and reputation. But thou, my son, dost value Thamar's love above all else. Thou hast twice ventured thy life for her. Therefore may she be so dear to thee, that thou wilt take no other wife beside her. Empty the cup of life together

even unto the dregs, but let no strange women come between thee and her."

Then Amnon said:

"Thamar was the only one of her parents, therefore she shall be an only one to me forever."

"I am thine forever," exclaimed Thamar, "for thou hast won me, and purchased my heart." The tears streamed down her cheeks as she thus spoke.

Then Thirza said to Amnon:

"Now everything is settled! there remains nothing more to be said. Thamar belongs to thee. Take her into the vineyard and tell her what is in thine heart, for she is yet like one dreaming."

Amnon embraced Theman, greeted Zimri also, and afterwards went with Thamar into the vineyard where he said to her:

"The dream is past and we have seen its interpretation. Now arouse thyself and let thy lovely countenance brighten again for me, because my happiness beams in thine eyes."

Thamar replied:

"Would that thy heart might always, as today, cleave unto me."

"Dost thou not yet trust me?" said Amnon. "Knowest thou not that at any moment I am ready to give my life for thee, to plunge myself into a thousand perils, to dwell among the lions, to despise every danger? For only in thee has my soul life, and my whole soul hangs on thy words. I swear this to thee by God in heaven."

They kissed each other repeatedly. She showed him his letter which she had always carried concealed about her, and said to him:

"My soul hangs on thy lips and thou dost turn it as thou wilt, therefore I will also believe that thy mouth is ever true and faithful."

Thamar no longer believed the story her brother Theman had told concerning Amnon; she banished all care from her heart and spent the morning in familiar conversation with her lover. When they returned to the house they found the table spread. All ate and drank and were of good cheer. Amnon, however, drank no wine, because he had taken a Nazarite's vow to drink no wine for thirty days after his arrival in Zion.

Hananel said to him:

"When the thirty days of thine oath are past, then we will rejoice at thy wedding."

When Maacah saw how the low-born Amnon was exalted and honored, and that she, when Thamar should be his only one, had no hope of sharing his affection, she was displeased. The next day she went to Jedidjah and revealed to him that Amnon had become unfaithful to his love—and had given his heart to another maiden, and that Theman also knew thereof. Jedidjah sought his son, who related to him all with which Pura had acquainted him, and added that he with his own eyes had seen the spot under the linden trees where they agreed to meet. Jedidjah was astonished and confounded over these revelations.

He commanded Theman to carefully conceal the matter from every person until he him-

self should succeed, through some artifice, to discover Amnon's secret. At the same time he said:

"Send Pura to serve Amnon, but also instruct him to keep a careful watch over his master's steps. If there is really any truth in this matter, Pura will impart it to Maacah and she will open Thamar's eyes. If Thamar should drive her chosen from her on account of his unfaithfulness, I will then force her to marry Azrikam, the son of my friend Joram, with whom I made a covenant. Amnon must bear his disappointment, for he deserves it. Meanwhile treat Amnon kindly, and be not hasty to spread slanderous reports concerning him before the whole matter has come to light."

On the same day Jedidjah said to Amnon:

"See, I have ordered the architects to build a house for thee, and also a bridal apartment at the spot where Thamar formed a covenant of love with thee. Now continue to live in my summer-house until the wedding-day. There thou canst watch the workmen and hasten their labor."

Amnon answered:

"Good, my father, it shall be done according to thy will."

On the same day Amnon went up to Mt. Olivet to dwell in Jedidjah's summer-house. He took with him all the treasures which had been given to him by Hananel. Pura was his servant whom he sent daily to Thamar with wine and sweet cider. She sent in return all sorts of dainties and precious herbs.

While Amnon dwelt in the summer-house he sent word to Sithri that he had returned from

Assyria and was now waiting impatiently for his wedding-day, and that each of the remaining days of the month appeared to him like a year. During all this time Pura discovered nothing wrong in his master, and thus passed twenty-seven days.

On the evening of the twenty-eighth day Uz came to Amnon and told him that Abisai was lying very sick and his brother had come from Carmel to visit him, and also that Abisai, if able, was coming to Jerusalem to congratulate Amnon on his wedding-day. Thereupon he left the house; but Amnon who had watched him closely, perceived he had something on his mind which was not intended for Pura's ears, and so followed and stopped him on the street.

Uz said to him:

"Come to-morrow evening to the hut at the Valley Gate, but be careful to conceal thy coming. There thine eyes shall behold the beloved of thy soul." Amnon gave Uz a present and the latter departed. Amnon waited until the next day rejoicing in the expectation of seeing his mother and sister.

* * *

The month passed away. Amnon counted only two days to his wedding. Then Zimri went to the banks of the Siloam, to a place where Azrikam had agreed to meet him. He passed by Absalom's monument, which is located at the foot of the cliff south of Jerusalem. There he saw one of the sons of the prophets, who was talking to the trees, saying:

"Come here, ye stubborn children of Zion, all ye who break the peculiar covenant and main-

tain conspiracies. Gaze upon Absalom's monument, for it stands as a warning to him who lifts up his hand against his father. His end will be like Absalom's. Who is the father of the people, is it not the king? Who is the unnatural sinner who has robbed his father? Sebna, the treasurer! Aye, he is a follower of Absalom. O thou stiff-necked! thou who regardest not the Lord, and who insultest his anointed! thou who dost join in conspiracies! behold, a horrible plague will come upon thee. Thou wilt be pursued, be pierced with spears, die childless, and be suspended between heaven and earth like Absalom. Absalom himself erected this monument, but thou dost acquire power and renown in Zion and dost build a tomb on the heights, and make a dwelling in the rocks; nevertheless the Lord will reject thee, and drive thee into a strange land. Absalom died like a bird caught in the tree-top, but thou wilt be free as a bird, yet ban and curse will rest upon thee. Thus hath the Lord spoken, through Isaiah-Ben-Amos, his servant."

Zimri listened very attentively to the youth's speech. The words pierced his heart like pointed arrows. He turned to the young man, and asked:

"Why dost thou preach here to the trees of the field? Are there no people in Zion with ears to hear?"

"The people are like grass withered by the heat of the day," the youth replied. "Their ears are dull of hearing, therefore it is better to preach in the wilderness where there are no men, than to barbarians in the city."

"O thou insane one!" exclaimed Zimri.

"Certainly," returned the youth. "I am insane because I have spoken the truth." With these words he departed.

While Zimri stood still reflecting upon the young man's speech, Azrikam came and said to him:

"What hast thou to say regarding all that has lately occurred? He who formerly kept sheep will now be a shepherd of princes, and I, who am a prince, can chase the wind."

"Thou art always expecting an evil wind," Zimri answered, "and I am not surprised that thy breath has become short."

"If thou dost speak thus to me," continued Azrikam, "why should I not lose heart? Yet I tell thee, the spirit of revenge has seized me anew, and my courage has revived. Is it then not enough that Thamar should despise me as altogether unworthy? To my vexation she has lifted up Amnon from the dung-heap to herself—given him her love, her friendship. And now this low-born man pursues me in all my ways like the spirit of a plague. Listen only to what has happened to me, and thou wilt be astonished. Yesterday Achan conducted me to the beautiful maiden whom Amnon loved before he was betrothed to Thamar. When we entered the hut at the Valley Gate, we found the maiden and her mother within busily weaving linen. What shall I say to thee, Zimri, of the little maid? In a word, if Thamar is as lovely as the moon, then is this one as glorious as the sun. So soon as I beheld her, I longed after her. I told her in the presence of her mother

that she might shake off the dust, and rule as a pretty, delicate mistress in my palace. She continued to gaze alternately on me and then again on her mother, and I found no answer on her lips. I said to her: 'Wilt thou then refuse the son of Prince Joram, who speaks to thee so kindly and condescendingly? Am I not truly desirous to raise thee up to myself?' The maiden still remained silent and answered not. The mother, however, said to me: 'Sir, forgive my daughter's silence, she is not accustomed to speak with men, much less with a prince who directs friendly, condescending words to her.' I did not allow her to finish, but said to her: 'I already know the reason of thy daughter's behaviour, a wind-bag has seduced her heart—Amnon, the shepherd, who leads all women astray in his fickleness. Has he not already sworn to Jedidjah never to take another wife beside Thamar, and now he has also laid in wait for thy daughter!' While I thus spoke the two women burst into tears, and were greatly alarmed. The mother said to me: 'The Lord do this and that to me if I give my daughter as wife to Amnon. She shall abide with me yet another month until she shall consider the matter, and she has become accustomed to thee, then I will speak to her of thee.' Achan, who had listened to the entire conversation, said: 'Let it remain thus, my lord. Thou canst trust this woman, she will tell thee no lies.' Then I arose and left the hut with a sorrowful heart.

"When night came on, I again returned thither, alone. I perceived a light in the hut, but I dared not enter. I pressed myself against the

wall, and sought to look through the cracks into the interior; great was my fear and astonishment at what my eyes beheld. I saw Amnon embracing and kissing the maiden; then the mother embraced and kissed the maiden, then the shepherd. My mind became confused. It grew dark before my eyes, and my ears seemed to be deafened by the noise of their kisses. Then I thought in my heart: 'This is the sweet maiden who is so modest she dares not speak to men. I have already revealed Amnon's vileness to her, yet she does not turn from him because she would rather be his concubine than mistress in my house.'

"I shook with anger and was about to set fire to the hut, but I restrained myself, came home, and told all to Achan. He said to me: 'Remain quiet, do not excite thyself. I stand by you in all this. If I do not bring the maiden into thy house, thou mayest banish me forever from thy presence.' Yet, how can Achan help us? I have with my own eyes, and not those of a stranger, seen Amnon's fickleness. This Amnon stands before me in all my ways like a veritable Satan. O, Zimri, were my heart cold and hard as ice, it would send out sparks; were milk and honey in my veins, they would be changed into the poison of dragons. I have already endured much shame and suffering through Amnon, but now he seeks my blood and life; for one of us must go to the grave, in order that the other may enjoy life."

When Azrikam finished speaking, Zimri awoke as from profound meditation, and said:

"Thamar has taken a snake into her house

wherewith to sport, yet it will fatally wound her with its poisonous bite. Up, my lord, the time has now arrived for us to pluck the fruit of our action. I will hasten to act, for the moments are precious. After a little thou wilt see the fire which is to consume Amnon, Theman, Thamar and the strange maiden. Then thou mayest deliver whomsoever thou mayest choose, like a brand from the burning."

Azrikam doubtingly answered:

"Take care that thou dost not sell the tiger's skin before thou hast caught him in thy net."

Zimri, however, said:

"Thou art entirely right, my lord, therefore let me now hasten to the work, for we have no time to lose." Then Zimri went hastily away to accomplish his purpose.

CHAPTER XVIII

The Vale of Kedron

THAMAR, at noon-time, on the same day, happy and cheerful, sat in her apartment. While her hands were busy making a handsome cap for her bridegroom to wear on their wedding-day, she sang a love song on her coming marriage. Maacah was arranging her mistress's wardrobe and sighing repeatedly.

"What ails thee, Maacah," asked Thamar, "that thou art continually sighing?"

Maacah shrugged her shoulders, and said:

"How can I rejoice over thy wedding-day, when I know that joy passes away like a shadow. It scarcely arrives before it already vanishes, and sorrow takes its place."

Then Thamar said:

"Cease thy vagaries!"

"Truly, I am only a simple maid-servant," continued Maacah, "yet there are certain signs, well-known among our family, which I have always found infallible. For three nights I have heard the ravens croaking on our roof, and thou verily knowest this portends nothing good; for these birds are the companions of sorcerers and magicians, and no peace blooms where they abide. Alas! my fears and my forebodings have all been

only too completely realized. O, my mistress! I must now convey bitter intelligence through my lips. I can no longer conceal it because it threatens danger to thee. I have acted according to thy command, and set Pura to watch over Amnon. He told me that his master holds intercourse with wizards and sorcerers."

Thamar was greatly horrified at hearing this, and she cried in the anguish of her heart:

"O God, Thou who art Almighty! give me Thy help and grant that Maacah's words shall not be true."

Maacah exclaimed:

"I also was terrified when I heard of this horrible deed!"

With a trembling heart Thamar inquired:

"Does Pura also know who they are, and where they dwell?"

Thereupon Maacah said:

"The accursed of God, they are two—a mother and daughter. The daughter is wonderfully beautiful. She ensnares men's hearts with enticements, and brings discord into families through her coquetry. She is also a sorceress who conjures spirits. Many respectable people have already been caught in her snares, for she stands in fear of no evil deed. Pura knows her abode, and yesterday he saw how Amnon made love to the vixen. Pura would have restrained him from his evil deed, but he feared harm would befall him if he should trouble her, for who can oppose sorcerers? They are utterly formidable. They are in covenant with wild beasts, and snakes lick the dust from their feet, yet their bodies are

unhurt; the flames cannot harm them, and they can press themselves against drawn swords without being injured. In very dark nights when the moon pales and the stars vanish at midnight, when thick darkness hovers over the still earth, then these daughters of evil go forth to wander around spots and places which the foot of man shuns, and over which the virtuous go with trembling. Then they go into the Vale of Kedron where all unholy and unclean things are cast, and to the Vale of Tophet, where children were formerly sacrificed to idols; they remain over night among the tombs and graves and question the dead. Yet woe to the eye which watches them and ventures to follow their wanderings, for the ravens of the valley will pluck it out and the young eagles will eat it."

Thamar fell upon Maacah's neck, and in her anguish cried:

"O Maacah, dear Maacah, only tell me that thou hast been talking to me in thy sleep, and henceforth I will love thee as a sister; tell me thou hast invented these lies concerning Amnon in order to prove my love, and I will give thee all Hananel's treasure. O give my Amnon back to me, for without him I am poorer than thou. But if thou hast spoken the truth, can I yet love Amnon?"

Maacah sighed and said:

"Woe to me, my mistress, because I have obeyed thy command. Yet whereunto would it avail if I should hide from thee the greatness of thy misfortune? Last night Amnon crept stealthily out of his house, and did not return until

towards morning. There must be a secret concealed behind this. Yet appeal to his conscience, perhaps he may still be converted from his evil way."

Thamar wrung her hands and cried:

"Leave me, Maacah, leave me! I will weep bitter tears in silence until my eyes shall behold my mighty downfall, which is as deep as the sea."

Her sobs checked her speech. After a little while she continued:

"Come what will, I, myself, will watch Amnon's footsteps this night. Go to Pura. Tell him as soon as Amnon leaves his apartment, to come hither to me. My parents shall have no intimation of this matter."

Maacah departed to carry out her mistress's instructions.

Thamar disclosed her unhappiness to her brother Theman. He became very angry, and said:

"I will go with thee and view the unholy flame which burns in the hut at the Valley Gate."

* * *

The night was dark. Pura came beneath Thamar's window where Maacah waited for him. She went in to Thamar and said:

"Arise! thou nobleman's daughter, do not draw back, for Amnon has hastened to the wicked ones."

Thirza entered Thamar's apartment, and when she saw her daughter's tear-stained cheeks, asked:

"What ails thee, my child?"

Thamar sought for an excuse, and answered:

"I weep because Amnon is greatly grieved over the death of his foster father, Abisai. I am going with Theman to comfort him in his sorrow and afterwards to bring him back."

Thirza, who could refuse no wish of her daughter, declared herself satisfied, and ordered Theman to convey Thamar to Amnon in a two-horsed chariot. Theman and his sister seated themselves in the carriage, and Pura drove the horses. They rode slowly along in the direction of the Valley Gate.

When they were yet some two hundred paces from the hut, Theman said to Pura:

"Remain here with thy team and wait for us; Thamar and I will go to the hut."

They went thither, looked through the cracks and beheld a wonderfully beautiful maiden, clad in silk and costly stuffs, adorned like a bride. Amnon put a ring on her hand, gave her costly earrings, looked upon her lovingly and kissed her. The mother smilingly gazed upon this lovely picture, alternately embraced them.

"Earth open thy mouth and swallow them," whispered Thamar to her brother, who softly answered:

"Lord, let thy lightning destroy them. Come, sister, let us flee from this place."

Then he grasped Thamar by the hand and led her away. She accompanied him with trembling limbs, and they both seated themselves again in the carriage.

Pura asked:

"Now, what have you seen?"

"Would that God had given us no eyes, then we should not have beheld all this wickedness," Theman replied.

"This is Amnon whom I have chosen," said Thamar. She could proceed no further, grief choked her voice.

"Yes, that is Amnon," continued Theman, "thy chosen one; who has chosen for himself a stranger who blooms like a rose on Mt. Carmel, while thou must wither."

"Alas! my brother," continued Thamar, "God has rolled his darkness over me and crushed me. Oh! a consuming fire burns in my bones."

"O this night!" muttered Theman. "May eternal darkness devour it, may it never behold the morning-light! This night like a furious dragon has devoured all Amnon's virtue, and has destroyed all the love and friendship which existed between us."

"Woe is me," mourned Thamar. "This night with its darkness has obscured all my days, and my life will be dark, even at noon-day; for on this night mine eyes have beheld the bright morning-star fall from heaven to hell. O would I were in a position to redeem him from thence."

"O if thou couldst turn my hell into Paradise; yet who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean," Theman spoke again.

While they thus grieved and mourned, Pura spurred on the horses. When they approached their parents' dwelling, Theman taught Thamar what she should say to her mother. They reached

home, alighted, and sent Pura away. When they entered the room, Thirza asked:

"What is the matter, my dear ones, that you appear so sad and dejected?"

Thamar replied:

"O mother, something horrible has happened to me. As we were driving to the house, a witch suddenly appeared before me who frightened me. She said to me, in my brother's presence: 'Take care, thou beautiful maiden, for harm threatens thee if thou dost become the bride of thy betrothed.' Thereupon, she vanished in a second. It cannot be otherwise, she certainly was a witch."

Thirza sought to comfort her:

"Go, give sleep to thine eye-lids, then the evil spirit which troubles thee will depart. Speak not of this matter to thy bridegroom, for it would only trouble him. Probably Azrikam has hired this woman to frighten thee."

She talked affectionately for some time with her daughter in order to banish the evil spirit from her, but Thamar knew too well the cause of her sorrow. She would not be comforted, but wept the entire night.

CHAPTER XIX

Thamar's Grief

HE morning came. Maacah awoke Thamar, who had fallen into a light sleep for a short time, and said to her:

"Awake, my mistress, for the sun has risen."

"Alas! my sun has gone down," Thamar exclaimed; "to-morrow, also, the sun will again arise to illumine my wedding-day, but yet gross darkness will prevail."

"Listen, my mistress," Maacah replied, "and be astonished! Amnon has arrived and awaits thee, he is standing in Hananel's apartment conversing with him."

Thamar moaned:

"O, he who has deceived my heart! Tell me, Maacah, hast thou ever beheld so handsome a youth as he? If all the maidens of Judea were to fix their gaze upon him, they would all become love-sick. Oh! I never turned my eyes from him, and my soul was bound with his; how then can I banish him from my presence? O thou, Almighty God, my strength! make my heart as stone that I may speak harshly to him. Yet no! He has deserted me with craft and deceit, and I will now treat him craftily and deceitfully. Go, Maacah, and tell him that after a little while I will receive him in my apartment."

Thereupon Thamar arose, bathed, anointed herself, and then attired herself in elegant garments; put on her ornaments, and assumed a cheerful countenance that Amnon might not perceive her confusion.

Amnon approached her and said:

"Is peace with thee, my only beloved? Has the sleep of the night refreshed thee?"

Thamar replied:

"The night appeared very long to me."

"Only one day more," continued Amnon, "then thou wilt call me thy husband, and I will name thee my wife. I shall then dare to kiss thee before all the world, and no one will reprove me for so doing."

With these words he kissed her on the lips.

Thamar blushed and said:

"Amnon, thy lips burn like fire. Hast thou only on that account come to me thus early in the morning?"

"If this kiss is only a trifle to thee," Amnon answered, "it is, nevertheless, a great and important matter to me, because my love to thee is a thousand times greater than thine. I have sworn to thee that I will order myself solely in accordance with thy words and wishes, whether I go or come. I have come hither to ask thee, my only one, shall I go to Bethlehem to visit Abisai, my foster father, who is very sick there?"

"Wilt thou evermore keep this, thy oath, as thou hast kept it unto this day?" said Thamar.

"I swear before God, I will never act contrary to thy words and wishes," replied Amnon.

"Therefore I will desire one thing from thee as recompense for my love to thee until this day, and thou shalt not deny my request. Leave my father's house, depart from the land of Judea, and after three days thou shalt no more set foot upon the soil of thy native land."

"O Thamar! was that thy voice, my little dove? Are these thy words, my only beloved?" cried Amnon.

"I am no more thy little dove, nor thine only beloved," Thamar replied. "No, henceforth I shall be thy enemy, thy opponent. I will no more love thee; for I have held counsel with my heart, and repent that hitherto I did not yield to my father's wishes. Now, I have changed my mind. I shall ratify the covenant which my father concluded with his best friend, and become the wife of Azrikam-ben-Joram. Behold now, Amnon, I am obstinate, stiff-necked and faithless, therefore, abhor me."

"Thamar! Thamar!" cried Amnon, gazing upon his bride in utter bewilderment. "Cease to mock me for I can no longer endure it." He remained silent for a moment, then suddenly he began to laugh and said: "I am ashamed of myself for having, if only for a moment, mistaken thy jests for truth. Lo, thy mouth has spoken bitter words, but thou dost forget that thy lovely eyes meanwhile looked mild as dove's eyes. For this reason I am convinced that thou wilt take back thy words, and in a moment will comfort me. Therefore. my dear Thamar, speak a friendly word such as I have been wont to hear from thee,

for why dost thou use such crafty and injurious words in order to provoke me?"

With these words he seized Thamar's hand with a loving grasp, but she withdrew it, saying:

"Let this suffice, Amnon, urge me no longer; reflect on my words and thy oaths! Depart from my face; still thou must not impart our interview to my parents." Therewith she turned her back upon Amnon and left the room.

"O God of justice!" cried Amnon despairingly: "It is like death to my soul! O horrible fate! Who now will comfort me?"

Broken-hearted he tottered out of Thamar's room, and hastened to leave Jedidjah's house before any one noticed his dejection. He walked as in a dream; it was night before his eyes, and his knees trembled under him. He dragged himself to his dwelling and fell exhausted on his bed. He quickly buried his head in the pillow which he wet with his tears, then he arose from his couch and rushed around the room like a madman; anon, he remained standing, and cried:

"O, it is only a horrible dream which I have dreamed or which Thamar dreamed while she spoke to me. Perhaps she only sought to prove me, to see how strong my love to her is. O God, how great will my joy be when she shall say to me: 'Really, Amnon, I have only been jesting.' Yet, why do I say this? Has not Thamar banished me? Has she not called me to go into another country, and have I not sworn to obey her commands in all things? O if I could only impart my grief to Hananel! Yet woe is me! Thamar's command forbids this, and I must be silent."

That afternoon Maacah called Zimri into the garden where Thamar was walking. He said to the latter:

"Why is it, my lady, that thou lookest so sad when the day of thy rejoicing is so near?"

Thamar answered him:

"Behold, I have found thee faithful above all the servants in my father's house, therefore I will reveal my unhappiness to thee and hope that what I confide to thee thou wilt keep secret from my parents."

"My heart," said Zimri, "shall not suffer my lips to reveal thy secret."

Then Thamar continued:

"Therefore, be affrighted over my misfortune! The youth whom I loved as the apple of mine eye, Amnon, my betrothed, has turned away from me, for his heart has been deluded by witches."

"Nay, my lady," answered Zimri, feigning great grief, "do not jest with me, for a youth like Amnon can not have done such things."

Then Thamar said:

"Thy comfort is vain, for I have not learned this from other people, but last evening I saw it all with my own eyes. Cursed be this night which has destroyed the happiness of all my days; cursed be the sorceress who has sought after this pure-hearted one and caught him in her snares. O Zimri, God's wrath has fallen upon me and turned my Paradise into hell; and yet, my heart hovers between hope and fear, and I know not whether to pity Amnon or to fear and shun him. Ah, my poor heart is torn with love and hatred, with

the pity and love which strive in my breast; for Amnon's love has taken such deep root, that I cannot tear it from my heart without its bleeding. I have this morning, in my anger, driven him from my presence; yet now my wrath has again departed, and all my pity is excited for him. Whom have I repulsed? Whom have I driven away? Amnon, the dearest one in the world to me, my all! Without him I am nothing, and my life lies sad and desolate as the wilderness without water-brooks. O Zimri, I have now disclosed to thee all within my heart, therefore, bring back my banished one again."

Zimri smote his hands together in astonishment, and cried:

"My heart grieves for thee, O Thamar, my mistress, while pity for thy chosen one fills my bosom. Alas! that ye who so truly loved must so suddenly separate now, when love is strongest."

With these words he seized his handkerchief and wiped his eyes. He resembled a crocodile lying beside the Nile in Egypt, who when it seeks to swallow a man seizes him by the feet, but if it happens to take him by the shoulder and is not able at once to devour him, begins to weep and howl. Such was Zimri's weeping and his mourning on Amnon's account.

Thamar, however, said:

"I pray thee, Zimri, give no sleep to thine eyes this night, go to Amnon, appeal to his conscience, persuade him and advise him with mild, affectionate words. Perhaps he will repent and

turn from his evil ways, so that the covenant of our love be not destroyed."

Zimri replied:

"If God has not utterly departed from his heart, I hope that thou mayest yet welcome him like a home-returning conqueror. May he receive instruction from thee, learn from thee, obey thee, then he will be the ruler of thy youth. Guide him, that he may be thy guide."

"If God looks upon him favorably," was Thamar's answer, "then I will not drive him from me, and my heart will be filled with greater love to him than hitherto."

CHAPTER XX

Amnon's Sorrow

MNON wept bitterly the whole day, and refused food and drink. At twilight Uz visited him and inquired:

"What aileth thee, Amnon, why art thou so depressed and discouraged?"

"It has pleased Thamar," said Amnon, "to suddenly banish me." Then he related all that had passed.

Uz shook his head in astonishment, and said:

"Have I not always told thee: 'Do not chase the crane which flies to heaven'? Thou wast like a sparrow who built his nest in the corner of a palace window and thought itself to be the master of the house, never considering that wind and rain might sweep away its fragile dwelling, or that it might be destroyed by the hand of man. Have I not always advised thee: 'Seek a companion of thine own rank, take her for thy wife and enjoy thy life'? But thou didst not obey me because the prince's daughter had befooled thee; thou wast like a simple-minded dove who flies blindly into the net. Thou desired to dwell among the princes in Zion, who were strangers to thee and knew not thy parents; they who neither fear

God nor regard men, for if but a little of the fear of God dwelt in Thamar's heart she would not have treated thee so cruelly."

"Thou, thyself," replied Amnon, "wert continually extolling her piety and amiability to me before I had ever seen her."

Then Uz said:

"Now, however, thou hast seen that her piety was only a robe in which she arrayed herself in order to appear more beautiful, and which she laid aside at pleasure. The rose-chains with which she bound thee have now become iron fetters; therefore, cease to follow her, lest in thy blind pursuit thou dost run against the wall and fracture thy skull. Forget the days wherein thou existed in her love, and banish her remembrance from thy heart."

"Cease, Uz," cried Amnon. "My right hand may forget its cunning, but to all eternity I can never forget Thamar."

While they were conversing, Zimri entered. Then Uz said to Amnon:

"I had almost forgotten the object of my coming. Know then that my master, Abisai, who is very sick, desires to see thee."

Amnon said:

"Come to me early in the morning, then we will go together to Bethlehem." Uz then departed, but he concealed what Amnon had confided to him from Naomi and Penina.

Zimri approached Amnon and greeted him with the words:

"Peace be with thee, Amnon, is all well with thee?"

"I hoped to find peace," responded Amnon, "but instead of well-being, find unhappiness and bitterness."

"I know the source of thy sorrow," continued Zimri, "and therefore hastened hither to comfort thee. Woe be to these times when every day brings new danger and evil intelligence. I stood bowed down on my watch-tower from morning till evening. At twilight I went out in order to stroll through the streets of the city, and lo, at every step I met with fearful things, and horror could be read upon every face. Many of our princes and noblemen, seeking to make their escape into a far country, are fleeing before the enemy. Some hasten over the sea to the Ionian isles, others flee to Tyre and Sidon in order to rescue goods on the high seas and ship them to Tarshish. I returned home to find there no rest, but instead revolution, disturbance and perverseness; for I learned that Thamar had discarded thee and had again chosen Azrikam. I sought then to persuade her with words. I recounted to her thy virtue and all that thou hadst done both for her and for her father's house. I also rebuked her for her behaviour towards thee. She, however, treated me haughtily, and said: 'Zimri, who hath set thee as counsellor and admonisher in my father's house? Be contented that thou hast been kindly received by us. O that no stranger had ever intruded into our family!' I was astonished over her words which sounded strange to me, for I had never heard her speak thus.

Thereupon I hastened to thee in order to inquire what this violent anger signified. Perhaps thou hast given her some provocation."

"I swear to thee before God that I am ignorant of having committed the smallest sin, or having erred against her in the least. Lo, Thamar has to-day driven me from her presence, and bidden me to go into a strange land. I shall not hesitate in obeying her command, for I will go out of the land of the living into the valley of death." While Amnon was thus speaking, bitter tears rolled down his cheeks.

Zimri shrugged his shoulders and said:

"I beseech thee, Amnon, grieve not and cease thy weeping; thy pains cause me sorrow and thy tears bring the water to my eyes. How can I assist thee if I also become a broken, bowed-down man? Break off thy sighing, and let us quietly talk the matter over and consider what shall be done."

Accordingly Amnon wiped the tears from his eyes, saying:

"Only speak, Zimri, and I will listen, for I am so crushed by the blow which has to-day fallen upon me, I can hardly speak."

"Alas!" Zimri said, "when the eyes of a man and woman meet, then therefrom begin pain, adversity, calamity, misfortune and all the other plagues which beset the children of men. I knew from the beginning what the end would be. I have known Thamar since her early youth, and was well aware how at one time she could be tender and amiable, at another stiff-necked as iron. Long before she knew thee she was obstinate and

had caused her parents trouble, for whom they disliked she loved, and whom they censured she praised. Therefore when her parents loved Azrikam, she hated him; now, when at last her parents receive thee, she rejects thee, for she has been like a stubborn colt ever since I knew her. Such contrariness thou canst see anew in her daily, for the will of her parents arouses within her a spirit of opposition. If thou wouldst only scorn her father, then Thamar would again receive thee into favor. I have told thee the exact truth, therewith thou mayest learn that no constancy is to be found in her. My heart has always been with thee. I have often said to myself: 'How unfortunate is Amnon, for Thamar has woven a spider's web about him. She leads him wherever she will till at last he will have gathered only idle wind; his hope will flee away like a bird, and his love will vanish like the image of a dream.'"

"Oh how sweet was this dream to me!" sighed Amnon bitterly. "O that it might have endured my whole life long. Yet to-day I am awake, in order to sleep forever."

"Listen, Amnon," said Zimri, "and mark well the parable which I will relate to thee. It treats of a fool who asked my advice as to whether he should seek a wife in the city or in the country. I answered him according to his folly: 'If thou hast firmly resolved to seek a wife, put on iron shoes with brass heels, provide provisions for many years and roam through the wide world; then thou canst say afterwards: "I have seen all the ends of the earth, I have searched into the

foundations of the deep, yet I have found no woman anywhere." ' This I have also taken to heart. Therefore I am resolved to live alone and unwedded. But thou, Amnon, whether thou wilt take my counsel for the future or not, yet listen to me for a moment. Is now, above all others, the time to take to thyself a wife? Now, when thou canst daily see how the princes of Judea are departing, dragging their wives with them as a burden and their children as a trouble. If an enemy should meet them they would barely escape with a whole skin. Are not those people much better off, who like we two can go out free and unencumbered? We both have been driven out from Jedidjah's house, we both are free and swift-footed as the deer and the hinds of the valley, therefore let us hasten and betake ourselves away before our feet stumble on Mt. Zion. Hasten to seek shelter somewhere, for who knows what evil Thamar has in store for thee. To-day she has sought for a pretense to quarrel, to-morrow she will put a burden upon thee of whose continuance thou hast no conception. She will impute sins to thee that she may appear righteous in all her deeds. If she contemplates all this, who can hinder her?"

"Woe!" exclaimed Amnon with a broken heart. "Woe! that it must come to this! I betook myself to distant lands in order to win Thamar, and now I must again depart into a strange country in order to escape from her. But thou, Zimri, dost to-day appear to me as a brother in misfortune, and as a faithful friend in time of need. Thy lot is still unlike mine, for I do not

stand alone, but have a mother and sister, and how it grieves me to leave them like little wandering lambs. Nevertheless, my oath drives me from Judea, and if thou dost ask me whither I intend to wend my way, I answer thee: I go forth to become the prey to the sword, to slavery, or any other misfortune which may first overtake me. But why wilt thou, Zimri, accompany me to want and calamity? Why dost thou behold the princes of Jerusalem who flee away in their fright? They forget that Zion has been a careful mother to them, that she nourished them in the morning-dew of their childhood, that she has been the guide and companion of their youth, that she has brought them up, borne them on her hands, and made them great; and now, her sons will harden their hearts against her, abandon her, leave her alone and deserted in this her time of need! O Thamar, thou also dost know verily that my soul is bound to our God, our temple, our priests, our king and our prophets with bands of ardent love. This thou knowest well, Thamar, and still thou hast, all at once, broken these holy bands. However to thee, Zimri, I will speak the plain, direct truth. Had I not sworn to Thamar to consider her command sacred, I would not deviate from the resolution never to set foot from the city in the days of affliction, and I would prefer to undergo all the sufferings and hardships of a severe siege, rather than to go into a strange land to rejoice on a soft pillow over my safety. Only remain, Zimri, and trust in God. Zion shall ever possess God's favor, and He will manifest His hand. For such a thing has never been heard on the whole

round earth, as that the Lord should abandon Jerusalem. In this hope then her citizens remain, for whither should they flee and where should they hide themselves from the wrath of the Almighty? Any escape from this is impossible. Whither should they turn? At every step the sword will slay them, or the lion devour them, or hunger, poverty and pestilence destroy them. O if Thamar had not banished me, most joyfully would I have poured out my young blood for Jerusalem and then have slept softly and restfully in the bosom of Mt. Zion."

Amnon's words were to Zimri like sharp arrows, for he perceived that despite all his troubles, Amnon remained faithful to God and His saints. Zimri trembled when he saw how he had erred in believing that the youth had indulged in intercourse with witches, for he now learned that the women mentioned were Amnon's mother and sister; therefore, he feared lest his intrigue be discovered and Amnon's innocence brought to light. All sorts of murderous thoughts bubbled in his heart like boiling water in a kettle.

After a little reflection, he said to Amnon:

"I have now resolved to accompany thee, and I do not repent my decision. I will go immediately to Jedidjah, and disclose to him that I am about to leave his house; he will not withold my wages, and will let me go in peace. Perhaps my words may succeed in turning Thamar's heart back to thee again. O! how great my joy would then be!"

Amnon, however, answered Zimri:

"Behold, a man has a thousand friends in

the days of his prosperity, but only one remains true in the time of calamity, and how dear is then that one! To-day, all my friends have forsaken me, even as Thamar has rejected me. Thou only hast come to comfort me, wherewith can I repay thee? A friend who knows not how to speak comforting words is like a harp which is never played, and hangs on the wall simply as a beautiful ornament."

Then Zimri said:

"Be at ease about me. I will shortly return and bring thee an answer." Thereupon he departed.

He then betook himself to Karmi's wine-shop.

CHAPTER XXI

The Letter

AZRIKAM came to Karmi's wine-shop, found Zimri, went with him into a private room and closed the door upon them.

When they were alone Zimri said to Azrikam:

"Now thou mayest boast on my account! Behold, my wisdom has led me to incite one of thine enemies against the other. Thamar has banished Amnon from her father's house, and from the land of Judea forever. He is now undone and bowed down, for he has sworn to obey all her commands. On that account he will not break his oath. After three days his feet will nevermore tread the soil of Judea; thou wilt then have an opportunity to choose either Thamar or the beauty of the Valley Gate. Yet, why art thou so sad and cast down that even my news is powerless to gladden thy countenance?"

Azrikam shook his head sorrowfully.

"Thou art losing thy labor, Zimri. With all thy craft and acuteness thou art unable to loosen the manifold twisted knots; for behold, before thou hast united two or three meshes, the thread breaks and can never more be re-united. Hardly

hadst thou freed me from the pangs of jealousy, before Satan went forth from his hiding-place to strike me a yet harder blow and to ruin me. I have lately noticed that Chepher and Bukjah, whom I have supported with gifts from my hand, have looked upon Achan with evil eyes. They have also shown enmity towards my steward and have followed him. Moreover, in the last few days, when they ascertained that he visited the hut at the Valley Gate, they have lain in wait for him more than ever before. This morning I went again with Achan to that hut. There the woman asked : 'Why hast thou hastened hither again before the month is ended, at whose expiration I promised thee thine answer?' I replied: 'Because thou hast hastened to break thine oath. Didst thou not receive Amnon in a friendly manner last evening? However, I do not wish to speak with thee, but with thy daughter.' Then I turned to the maiden, and said: 'Know thou, sweet, beautiful one, thou hast kindled the fire of anger in Thamar's heart so that her jealousy will pursue thee to hell—and who will protect thee from her? Therefore, now when harm threatens thee I would be thy protector. I care not who thou art, what thine origin, or why thou art here, for my love to thee shall cover the multitude of transgressions. Only come and dwell peacefully and at thine ease in my palace, and thy mother may also live with us. But woe to thee, thou unfortunate one, if thou wilt not attend to me; then thy beauty shall become a snare to thee, thou shalt be crushed under my hand, and thy mother shall eat the dust!' Then the woman said to me:

'Yet reflect, my lord, thou art a prince's son, while my daughter is poor and humble. If thou wert to take her home as thy wife, thy name would be cast down in the dust.'

"While she was thus speaking, Chepher and Bukjah entered. As soon as Chepher saw the woman he whispered to me: 'This is the very woman of whom I spoke to thee at Karmi's.' Achan cast an evil glance upon Chepher and said to him: 'What business hast thou here, and why hast thou come hither to relate mysteries?' Chepher replied: 'Achan, thou hast verily come hither to inquire from these women concerning the future. We, however, search alone after the mysteries of the past. We wish to know how the night can be made clear as the day, and what ought to be done to a servant who has been a traitor to his master's house. Concerning the last we have no need to consult the astrologers, for thou wilt, as I hope, make this plain to us.'

"The maiden in great fright clung closely to her mother, and clasping her hands, cried: 'Tell me, darling mother, what has happened to us? People whom we never knew before gather in our hut. Their mouths utter fearful things, and their eyes diffuse terrors. I cannot understand these things.'

'Now, cease from me,' said Achan, 'and from these honorable women. If thou dost not become silent, I will stop thy mouth with pebbles.'

"Then Chepher laughed and said: 'Long before thou hast succeeded in stopping my mouth with pebbles, thou, who dost here associate with

witches and this hellish crew, shalt have eaten the dust. Come, Bukjah, let us present ourselves before the elders in the gates, and relate to them that Achan visits witches and calls up the dead. Do thou, Azrikam, my lord, depart from this place, for why shouldest thou charge thyself with such abominable sins? Cease to associate with Achan who deceives thy soul, and who will ensnare in his net these women who appear honorable in his eyes.'

"Achan, however, replied: 'Well, let us all three go together to death, for our time has arrived. I will myself go before the elders and open my mouth so widely that the mouths of all the falsehood mongers will be stopped. Still, listen to me for this once, and then put your finger on your lips.' Thereupon, he whispered a few words in Chepher's ear which so excited the latter that he immediately sprang to his feet, glared wildly upon the two women, and then became completely benumbed with fright. After a little, in a low, trembling voice, he said: 'We will therefore cause no suffering one to another.' He also whispered something to Bukjah which frightened him. Then I thought, what kind of horrible words must these be which so terrify these two, and I also began to be afraid.

"Chepher and Bukjah now left the hut, and after a while we followed them. However, I knew not what to think of the events which had just occurred, and I looked anxiously for the clearing up of singular secrets. Achan said to me: 'Be not alarmed, my lord, for thy peace is assured with ours.' He then said to Chepher and Buk-

jah: 'Come at midnight to my master's house, that we may consult over our private matters.' To this they assented.

"When we arrived at home I besought Achan to give a solution of the matter. He followed me into my apartment, closed the door, fell upon my neck, began to embrace and kiss me, and then with many tears said: 'The time has now come when I can roll away from my heart the stone which has burdened me ever since thy birth. Therefore, know that through a crime I have made thee the heir to this thine immense wealth. The two women with whom we have been are Naomi and her daughter.' When I heard this, I rose up and my knees trembled. But I asked him: Why didst thou then advise me to take for my wife, my lovely sister, the daughter of Joram, my father? Achan replied: 'That is so, yet a heavy burden oppresses me. Hasten not to turn too quickly from me, and to blame me. Thou wilt have time enough for that. Wait until it is night and Chepher and Bukjah have come hither, then we will consider how we may extricate our necks from the noose.' Now, Zimri, after thou hast heard all this, dost thou comprehend the perplexity in which I find myself? Why wilt thou also continue to boast that thou hast delivered me?"

This intelligence alarmed Zimri. Turning to Azrikam he said:

"Achan, Chepher and Bukjah are dangerous associates who conceal terrible things. Yet we will not at the present time trace out the reasons for their deeds before I despatch my remaining

arrows, for I have not yet utterly ruined Amnon. But if these two evil-doers should together open their mouths before the elders they could turn the wheel to the injury of our projects, for who can be sure that two such confederates would keep a matter secret? Thou art now aware, Azrikam, how much toil I have given myself on thine account,—that I have been the shade on thy right hand. Therefore, give me now my reward, or else I must join forces with thine enemies and then thine adversaries would exult over thy destruction. Verily, I can open Thamar's eyes to all the secret intrigues of which she previously has been ignorant, and which thou hast carefully avoided mentioning. Is not Amnon the brother of that maiden, and is not the woman at the Valley Gate his mother? Did not Amnon himself reveal this to me? Were Thamar to become acquainted with but a syllable of this, Amnon's sin would vanish like mist before the sun."

Azrikam was completely dismayed over these words. At the same time anger burned within him, but he replied:

"Half of my wealth is certainly assured to thee. Trust me, I will keep my promise. I know that my honor and all my possessions hang upon thy lips. Now assist me yet this time with thy advice."

Zimri paced restlessly up and down the room, apparently absorbed in deep thought. After a while he stood still, seized Azrikam by the hand, saying:

"Bukjah and Chepher will come to thy house to-night. Make them drunk and set fire

to them, then they together with their secrets will ascend in smoke. Yet now go and make wise and intelligent preparations for the carrying out of my counsel. I demand my reward from thee in clinking coin, for I will accept no inheritance of fields and vineyards. Now I will go and despatch my last poisoned arrow against Amnon. This I will do for our mutual security."

Zimri went from thence and procured some of the poison of snakes, which he always kept ready for his designs. Then he betook himself to Amnon, and said to him:

"Jedidjah is not at home. He sits with the princes and the king's counsellors, who are deliberating over the situation of the city. All the household are sleeping. A thought has come to me like a lightning flash, and I have returned to impart it to thee. I have never yet relinquished the hope that Thamar would repent of her anger. Therefore send her by the hands of Pura a bottle of the sweet wine which thou hast been wont to present to her, and with it a letter full of tender entreaties to soften her heart. Pura will deliver the letter to her when she goes into the garden for her morning walk; I will be in the neighborhood in order to complete and strengthen thy words; I will maintain a countenance hard as flint and will rebuke her to her face for her treatment of thee, for I desire no favor from her and have no fear of her anger. I have served her father with a faithful heart and with clean, honest hands, and I can say with a clear conscience, I have ever been a trustworthy servant. Therefore, Amnon, follow my counsel. Thereby thou canst

prove Thamar. She will either renew her love to thee, or she has never truly and sincerely loved thee."

"Thy counsel is good," answered Amnon. "O, would that Thamar henceforth might again be to me as formerly. Do this, Zimri, and forsake me not. Remain with me until my night ends, for I am like one struck with insanity, and only when I behold thy countenance do I regain my senses."

"Be not afraid," rejoined Zimri. "I will be with thee and stand by thee in joy and sorrow, for I know the ground of all thy distress."

Amnon seated himself and with eyes swimming in hot tears, wrote to Thamar in these words:

"Incline thyself yet once more unto me, O, thou most beautiful of women. Tell me, gentle Thamar: What have I done unto thee and what wrong have I committed that thou hast banished me from thy presence, and dost desire to expel me from God's holy inheritance, and out of thy father's house? O, bear in mind, thou tender one, that I was once a simple shepherd and that my heart dared not think of thee. I have not sought thee, but thou didst seek me with thy love. I dared not hope for thy favor, but thou didst infuse trust into my heart and thy charming lips said to me: 'Hope, Amnon, for hope is life!' Thereby, thou didst inspire me with courage and confidence for the accomplishment of mighty deeds which would enable me to maintain a lofty career. Thou hast exalted me to heaven, and now thou wouldest cast me down to hell. Thou

hast poured me out as a goldsmith pours out a costly metal; thou hast melted me like wax in a furnace. O, Thamar, thou wonderful and lovely one, reflect that I am thy creation. Why wilt thou now at once destroy me?

"Behold, the potter is blamed if for no reason he breaks a handsomely shaped vessel in pieces. O woe is me! Thy words have dashed me in pieces. They have bowed my spirit down to the dust; they have brought my soul to death. Now I am suspended between hope and despair and know not what shall be the end. O, thou mild and lovely one, lift upon me the light of thy countenance again, and restore to me the joyfulness of heart which I possessed in the days of Bethlehem. Above all, I beseech thee at least reveal to me why I am so unfortunate.

"I spend the whole day in considering and reflecting upon what I shall do, and may God be with my deeds this day. I send to thee, as I have often done before, a bottle of sweet wine. If thou dost accept it as a token of friendship, then, O bliss! then I shall again hold my head high. But if it is returned to me as a sign of aversion, it will be a proof that God has said to me: 'Depart and go into a far country.' Yet know, Thamar, I shall always hold thy command sacred. I have sworn to thee, and how shall I forswear myself? I will depart into exile. I will impose upon my heart, which has ever been faithful to thee, fearful pangs; and should I die in a strange land, my last words shall be: 'Forgive, my heart, endure and be silent, for Thamar desired thy agony.' Behold, Thamar, thou sweet

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one, to-day for me happiness or misfortune, honor or shame, life or death, hang on thy lips. O, speak only a word and that will teach me whether it is to be my portion to ascend to heaven or descend to the lowest hell. Behold, thou beloved one, my destiny rests in thy hand, so then have mercy upon poor Amnon."

When Amnon had finished the letter, he handed it to Zimri:

"Now read what I have written."

While Zimri was reading the letter Amnon smote his brow, wept and said:

"Alas, Thamar, that it has come to this pass with me. O woe is me, that I must speak to thee with other words than those of love and affection!"

Zimri read the letter over and over again, then said to Amnon:

"If Thamar were as hard as stone, yet she must be softened by the ardor of thy words; and were she made of iron, she must be melted like wax. Yet if she will not listen at this time, and shall disregard the chiding words which I shall speak to her, then she is no woman, but a raging lioness and there remains to thee no other alternative but to flee from her presence. The morrow will determine all this for thee. Prepare now thy bottle of wine that it may be ready at early morn."

Amnon did so and placed the bottle on the table. Then they both laid themselves down to sleep. Zimri, however, arose quietly in the mid-

dle of the night, mixed poison with the wine, but he said nothing of this to Pura.

* * *

Who does not rejoice over the glimpses of the rosy morning, and who is there that does not hope for the break of day, which sheds light upon all hidden things? The sun, the friend of all the living, pours his beams upon the evil and the good, and illumines the path of the upright and the way of the wicked.

Amnon longed for the coming of the morning which should make an end of the darkness and of the sorrow in his soul. Zimri's corrupt heart waited for the day which should furnish him light for his evil deeds.

When morning broke, Amnon, Zimri and Pura arose. Amnon ordered Pura to carry the bottle of wine and the letter to Thamar. Zimri, however, said to the lad:

"May the Lord bless thy way and pour out upon Thamar a spirit of gentleness and kindliness, wherewith she may be softened and may be prevailed upon by the words of thy master." Thereupon Pura went his way.

"Now, I will also betake myself to Thamar," said Zimri, "in order to bring her answer back to thee, but I advise thee to conceal thyself, for we cannot yet know how the matter will terminate. It may be that Thamar in her fury may persist in striving to do something to thee which thou has never foreseen. Therefore, go quickly

away from here, and hide thyself in the well-known place under the olive-trees."

Amnon sighed and said:

"If Thamar hides her countenance from me, I have no hiding-place under heaven."

Zimri departed from Amnon with a raging heart, and thoughts filled with robbery, craftiness and assassination. He resembled Satan, who when he went forth out of hell to destroy the earth, was followed by his bad angels, pestilence, malady, murder and death. He said to himself:

"My harvest is now ready, even to the smallest particular. It is done, and all the work is finished. Then must my reward, the fruit of long years of labor, be ample and complete."

* * *

Uz came to Amnon and said to him:

"Behold, thy mother and sister are solicitous on thine account, for they know not why thou didst not come to visit them yesterday, but I have not let one word regarding thy trouble fall from my lips."

"I have yet ventured a last experiment with Thamar," Amnon replied, "and shortly my sentence, either for good or evil, will be made known to me. My heart is sad and I tremble every moment."

"If thou wouldest have listened to me in the beginning," said Uz, "all would have been different, as I have always told thee. The beginning of love is care, its midst deceit, and its end unspeakable misery. Its sparks and flames give

no light, but they scorch and consume the marrow of youth. Well is it for him who hides from the fiery passion. But if thou art already in its power, then let thy heart become hard and let all weakness depart from thee. Hope smiles from heaven upon the courageous, and deliverance arises from the earth for the resolute. But know, not even the heat of summer's day will dry the tears of those who suffer innocently. They are all counted by Him who dwells in heaven, and He provides help and counsel in His own time."

CHAPTER XXII

Zimri's Treachery

HE sun arose upon the City of God, and lively traffic had already begun in the streets. The drovers came in from the country with their fattened bullocks; the shepherds also brought young cattle, fat sheep and lambs in order to sell them. Other dealers brought oil, cider, wine and every kind of fruit. These all passed up to the East Gate where Jedidjah dwelt.

He and his wife watched awhile the busy throng. Then he said to Thirza:

"The people seem to slaughter many cattle in these days. They kill the oxen from the stalls, the sheep from the herds and drink the wine which has yet remained in their vats as if they wished to fill their stomachs for a jubilee. God appointed this day for weeping and mourning, yet there is rejoicing everywhere."

Thirza sighed as she answered:

"Yes, weeping and mourning have begun in our house. Thou, my husband, didst order that they should slay the sacrifices and prepare everything for to-morrow, the festival day of Amnon and Thamar. Behold, all things are ready, but Thamar's mind is troubled. She has wept and mourned and sleep has departed from her

eyelids for the whole night because she believes the words of a crazy witch, who appeared to her in the night-time. On this account she anticipates misfortune to her bridegroom."

Then said Jedidjah:

"Thirza, I will now speak the truth to thee. Ever since Amnon came under the shelter of my roof, rest and peace have deserted my household. Thamar, more especially, has manifested a stubborn disposition. Therefore, we will carefully observe her and see what God may have in store for her."

"There she stands in the garden," Thirza replied, "cast down and dejected. I left her when I perceived that all my comforting availed nothing, for she concealed her sorrow in the depths of her heart and would not be consoled."

"Let us observe her closely to-day," said Jedidjah; "to-morrow I will urge her to open her heart to me, for she is now eighteen years old."

Zimri now entered the garden, where he found Thamar reading Amnon's letter; her countenance assured him that her anger was giving place to the stirrings of pity and love. Maacah, however, stood before her mistress holding the bottle of wine in her hand.

Zimri noticed all this, and with a countenance pervaded with well-feigned anguish, exclaimed:

"O, my mistress, cast the abomination from thee and save thy life!"

At this, Thamar lifted up her eyes. Zimri approached with fearfully earnest mien.

"Peace be with thee, my mistress," he began in agitated tones. "Have I yet come in time? Dost thou still live? Have I perchance become delirious from what my eyes have beheld? No, for verily that is the fatal bottle and my eyes have not been mistaken. O Lord, thy grace is mighty. The bottle remains untouched, and the life of my mistress is saved! Praise God, He has not yet removed His protection from my master's house."

Greatly astonished, Thamar arose, and looked wonderingly upon Zimri.

"Suffer thy words to be like well-aimed arrows which hit the mark, and retain none of them in thy quiver," she said warningly.

"How shall I find words," cried Zimri, "for that which I have to say? Amnon's tongue is like the pen of a skillful writer, but his heart devises evil deeds. He speaks beautiful words in order to conceal the wickedness which he wishes to accomplish. I will say nothing more regarding the matter save this—cast the letter from thee, pour out the wine and forget Amnon."

"Zimri!" exclaimed Thamar. "Is the love in my heart to Amnon like the moss on the roof? Dost thou think I can blow it away with the breath of my mouth? No, Zimri, Amnon has so filled all the recesses of my heart that thou canst not expel him therefrom even with whirlwinds and thunderbolts. Thou must at once tear out all the lovely flowers which he for a year and a day has planted therein, or thou must take an axe and with painful blows hew out the centre of my heart, for his love is as strong as a young cedar."

Then Zimri began to tear out his hair. "O Satan has persuaded me to meddle in this matter which does not concern me. Would that the blow had paralyzed me yesterday."

"Notice, Zimri," said Thamar, "that thou art unwise. I see plainly that hell and all the horrors of Tophet are buried deep in thy heart, and that thou hast come hither to frighten me. Let the stones of death hail down upon me, pour hell-fire upon my head, but let me not pass away in uncertainty. What does it avail thee to show me the arrows which have been formed to injure me, if thou dost conceal the bow from whence they come? I wish now to know from whose hand I shall be wounded, and who it is that has purposed my death?"

"Listen then, thou delicate one," said Zimri, "and make thy heart like flint that it may not be crushed to atoms by my words, which will strike harder than club and hammer. Thou didst order me to exhort Amnon to his face, and to bring him back to thee. But I thought within myself—his secrets could not be learned through censure or exhortation, so I choose a deceitful way to obtain them. I went to him and behaved as if I were ignorant of what had happened to him, and began to complain regarding thee, my mistress, and said to him: 'I know not what wrong my mistress has found in me that to-day she should have reviled and reproached me, and have forbidden me ever again to set foot over the threshold of her father's house.' Thereupon I besought him to speak a good word for me whereby I might be again restored to favor. Then he

commanded his boy Pura to bring out wine and cider. He said: 'Drink, Zimri, for wine is good for a distressed heart.' Amnon drank freely. I, however, made no reference to his Nazaritic oath.

"He went on to say: 'Thou dost desire me to be thy mediator with Thamar; verily, I myself need such a mediator, for lo, she has turned her heart from me and has driven me away with anger. To-day I remember my youth which was spent in poverty and lowliness, for Abisai bought me when a child and I became a shepherd of his sheep. Yet my powerful arm and my handsome figure enabled me to rise from the sheep-fold and to seat myself among the nobles of the land. Thamar fell in love with me and I returned her affection, because she is the daughter of the "Benefactor" and her wealth is immense. Our love was discovered by Jedidjah, who drove me from his house. Then I bravely took my life in my hands, went to Assyria and ransomed Hananel, and through my bravery regained all his possessions. I thought within myself: "I will obtain rich treasures and make for myself a name among the princes."

" 'Then Thamar began to look askance at me, to tease me and to be jealous because I possessed riches which my parents had not gathered. It cannot be otherwise than that she has cast her gaze upon another youth. But let her watch herself. I have also learned wisdom from experience. I am no longer a shepherd, much less a stray lamb who knows nothing. Behold, Zimri, thou art lamenting because Thamar has driven

thee from her father's house. She has expelled me, not alone from her father's house, but also from the land of Judea. Yet I am not dejected. I laugh at her commands. According to you, Jerusalem is the mistress of the kingdoms and her inhabitants are first of all nations. Formerly I thought thus, but now since my eyes have seen the great city of Nineveh, I know better. Yonder I saw the wise men of the East who understand mysterious speech, the sorcerers, magicians, soothsayers, together with those who read the stars. All these appeared before my eyes and wisdom entered my mind. Therefore, Zimri, fear not; reach me thy hand and form a covenant with me. Then instead of being a servant of thy master, thou wilt henceforth be a master over thy servants.'

"Then I discovered that in his heart an evil seed had begun to germinate; that he had secretly planned to deceitfully ruin thy life and to lay wait in ambush for thee. Then I cast my fish-hook into the depths of his heart, and said: 'What dost thou think, Amnon, concerning the king of Assyria? Will he really make an end of Judea as he has done with Samaria?' 'What I think has already been spoken by thy mouth, but guard well thy tongue and make no mention of such things to those who heartily love Zion. Verily, Zimri,' he answered, 'Sennacherib will work such destruction in Jerusalem as has never before been witnessed. He will raze the city to the ground; nothing thereof will remain. Then oxen, calves, pigeons and turtle-doves will battle one with another.'

"I sought to learn yet more, and inquired: 'What wilt thou do with thy little dove if she should recall thee to herself?' He answered: 'My dear little dove with the silver wings? No! No! I will never give my little dove to destruction, and no hunter shall ensnare her.' "

Thamar, who had listened to these words of Zimri, now cried with a countenance beaming with joy:

"O, I have heard enough, Amnon, my Amnon, still loves me! Hast thou nothing more to tell me?"

"Would that my ears were deaf!" exclaimed Zimri, "and could not hear these words! Dost thou wish, my mistress, to have me speak sweet, loving falsehoods to thee? O let me rather go."

"O thou man," cried Thamar, "thou who art unable to predict good, thou who dost continually seek for an angel of God on the earth!"

To this Zimri replied:

"Verily, an angel of God. Ever since I have known Amnon I have always listened eagerly to his words, which would have edified even the angels in heaven. But alas! what terrible things did he speak last night! The devil himself must have stopped up his ears in order not to hear them. Amnon gave wine and cider to drink, and partook himself to such an extent that it began to take effect upon him. His eyes were red, his tongue became thick, and he opened his mouth to naught but fearful words. He spoke disrespectfully of our king, our princes and our warriors, and made himself merry over Ben-Amos and the school of the prophets to which he formerly be-

longed. Then he began to speak of thee again, and said: 'Zimri, thou didst ask me what I should do with my little dove. Now, I will tell thee. Know thou she shall not become a sacrifice to the sword, neither shall she be reckoned among the number of those who perish from hunger. I myself will prepare a grave for her, and I will place her therein because she has treated me deceitfully.'

"I said to him: 'Why art thou so suddenly changed when thy mouth only lately overflowed with love and friendship for Thamar?' He answered: 'Verily, the tongue speaks this and that, while the heart pursues its own course. Only wait a little while, then thou wilt see that I have acquired much wisdom, and that not in vain have my feet borne me to Assyria.' "

Thamar laid her hand upon her heart and prayed:

"Almighty God, give me strength to bear all this."

Zimri continued:

"My strength became exhausted by all that I heard, and my mind became utterly confused from the wine. At last slumber overcame me and I fell into a deep sleep. I lay on my couch dreaming for a long time. Suddenly I awoke and Amnon stood before me. It must have been about midnight. He said: 'Arise, Zimri, follow me, then thou wilt learn my power.'

"I arose like one in a dream and followed him. My steps staggered hither and thither like those of a drunken man, for the wine had not entirely left me. Deep darkness covered the earth,

no star was to be seen in the sky, and the dismal night lay all around. He went forward in silence to the Vale of Tophet. There fell upon my ears a youthful voice, which seemed to proceed from a young woman. Directly, I heard these words: 'Heigho! be joyful, mother, Amnon, my bridegroom, has arrived.' A woman's voice shouted: 'The altar of sacrifice is built. Therefore, my daughter, kindle the fire whereby thy lover may behold all the powers of the world, which stand ready to obey thy behest.' Immediately the stench of sulphur and burning pitch assailed my nose. A greenish-red flame arose over the altar. By its light I perceived a handsome woman and a lovely maiden. Both wore garments of raven-black whose borders gleamed with strange lights. Their hair was unbound and hung loosely over their shoulders. They shouted: 'Burn fire, burn! Kindle hell-fire in Thamar's breast! Infuse jealousy which burns like fire into Thamar's heart. Burn, hell-fire, burn!'

"The woman then greeted Amnon: 'Now thy covenant with Thamar is annulled.' Amnon kissed the maiden's hand, saying: 'I renounce Thamar with all her riches, and henceforth will delight myself in thy love alone.' The maiden replied: 'I will now summon fearful witnesses to our covenant.' She muttered and whispered in a peculiar manner. Presently a horrible whirlwind swept over the Vale of Tophet, and from each of the four corners of the air unclean spirits drove the wild beasts of the desert thither. Lo, the lions with their young, growling bears, howling jackals and grunting boars gathered there!

After this came the clamor of all kinds of birds of the night. Owls hooted, screech-owls screamed and ravens croaked. Snakes crawled out of every cleft and rift in the rocks; they hissed and displayed their fiery tongues. Then a figure in the semblance of a beautiful woman appeared, with a swollen, snow-white body. From her pale countenance two deep-set eyes burned with a dark, deceitful glow. This was Lillith, the goddess of evil, who ever goes about seeking to kindle the glow of sinful love in men's hearts. I gazed on the scene in amazement. The earth opened, the dead arose from their graves, shook the dust of the earth from their bodies and walked abroad. Satan himself in bodily form stood near the sacrificial fires, while demons and spectres leaped like goats as they sprung around in a wild dance.

"A fearful horror overtook me at this strange spectacle. In my anguish of heart I cried: 'O, Almighty God, whither have I come?' Lo, a horrible demon sprang towards me and I shuddered! He cried to me: 'Cease, hold thy bawling tongue! Here no one must mention the name of Him up yonder. There stands Satan, the king of terrors—bow before him, call upon him.' The maiden, however, seized a ravenous lion, dragged him by the mane to the altar, killed him and burned him as a whole-offering. Afterwards she took some of the blood, sprinkled the altar and said to Amnon: 'This be the blood of thy covenant, and therewith thy covenant with Thamar whom thou rescued from the lion is dissolved and destroyed.' The woman also slew two boars, offered them on the altar and put the remainder

of the flesh in a pot. She also poured wine into a vessel, having first sprinkled some upon the altar. Then the maiden cried with a loud voice: 'Do thou, Satan, and all the terrors of the world, bear witness to my covenant with Amnon.' Afterwards she muttered a few words in a strange tongue. Suddenly all the apparitions vanished.

"The mother and daughter cooked the flesh of the boars. When it was done they sat down with Amnon, consumed the flesh of the dead sacrifices, and drank the wine which they shared with Satan. They poured the remainder of it into a bottle and mixed with it poison from an adder's head. They invited me to sup with them, but I declined, saying that I was too frightened to eat. The maiden said to me: 'Take care to reveal nothing of what thou hast here beheld; that would cost thee thy life.' Amnon took part in all their proceedings, and caroused all night with the two women.

"I became utterly bewildered over what my eyes beheld and my ears heard. Finally, my strength failed, and I fell into a death-like slumber. When I again awoke and opened my eyes I found myself in Amnon's apartment. I arose from my couch for the new day was breaking. I saw Amnon give Pura a bottle of wine and a letter. I heard him command the boy to carry them both to Thamar. He said to me: 'I have now, Zimri, shown thee all my terrors; thou shalt also behold my craftiness. Yet guard well thy mouth.' Amnon left the apartment for a moment. I stole out, thinking: 'I will hasten to my mistress

to disclose all to her.' Praise God, the bottle is yet untouched; my mistress lives!"

Thamar, who had heard all this with fear and trembling, now shuddered like one awakening from a frightful dream. She said:

"Thoughts sweep like a whirlwind through my head,—the four pillars of the earth appear to totter before my vision. Stand up, Maacah, let me support myself on thee."

"Zimri appears to me like a dreamer," said Maacah. "I cannot believe that he while awake saw and heard what he has described. Let us prove for ourselves whether his words will stand the test."

Thereupon she took the dove which Theman, as a token of true affection, had once brought to his sister from the Mount of Olives, and which was a great pet of Thamar's, and gave it a few drops of Amnon's wine. The little creature flapped its wings a few times, fell to the ground and was dead in another moment.

Thamar grew pale and shuddered. "O, my mistress," cried Maacah, "death lurks in this bottle. What sayest thou thereto?"

"What then shall I say? Ye mountains fall upon me, and ye hills cover me! He who seeks my life wished to carry out his wicked plans today."

Zimri tore his hair and cried:

"O, if I had only died yesterday, then I should not have lived to behold all this wickedness! Take courage, my mistress, wherewith thy foot may have power to tread upon the head of this adder before he bites thy heel."

Thamar remained silent, the intense beating of her heart prevented utterance.

Zimri feigned embarrassment while he said: "Thy sorrow, my mistress, grieves my soul; but didst thou not command me to tell thee all?"

Thamar uttered a deep sigh, and said: "Behold thou art not overwhelmed with all the crime which thine own eyes have seen, while I am utterly cast down by what I have only heard from thee."

"I am a man," replied Zimri, "and regard Amnon with indifference, therefore I can better endure the matter. But do thou now also cast away all this wickedness, and forget him and his evil deeds. I charge thee, however, in God's name to repeat nothing which I have told thee, because I fear Amnon's wrath."

"O, thou cowardly wretch, verily thou hast now told me all that thou hadst to say, therefore depart, disturb me no longer," Thamar angrily exclaimed as she went into her own apartment.

Jedidjah presently entered therein, and inquired:

"What ails thee, my daughter, that thou art consumed with sorrow and dost pine away like a shadow? Why dost thou conceal thy grief from thy father? Am I not thy best support and thy most faithful helper?"

Thamar fell on her father's neck and wept:

"O father, forgive thy unhappy daughter. Behold, I rebelled against thee. I looked upon Amnon with the eyes of a woman and must needs love him. But alas! I have become aware of his great wickedness. He has delivered himself over

to all that is horrible and I have driven him forever away from me. I beseech thee, my father, not to let Hananel know of this, for it would make him ill. I have brought an abomination into thy house, and I will also banish him therefrom."

Jedidjah shook his head.

"Woe is me, and woe to thee, my daughter, that thou ever sought to conceal all thy thoughts and actions from thy father! If thou hadst been frank with me, many things would have been different. Therefore write a letter to Amnon and forbid him my house. I have long foreseen this result and have restrained myself because I wished to see how long he would maintain his intimacy with thee."

Thamar wept bitterly as she listened.

"Truly, my father, Amnon has done many things worthy of imprisonment. Heaven wonders at his deeds; the angels weep over him; he has caused even the foundation of hell to totter. Leave me alone now, my father, for my mind is bewildered and needs rest, and I cannot gaze upon thee without bitterly reproaching myself. Woe is me for my obstinacy and disobedience."

Jedidjah left the room. Thamar threw herself on her couch and remained there filled with bitter thoughts. After a while Hananel visited her. When he beheld her tear-stained countenance, he inquired:

"What aileth thee, Thamar, my daughter?"

Thamar answered through her tears:

"Turn thy gaze away from me, thou venerable old man. Thou hast lived many years, and

in thy long pilgrimage hast seen both misery and happiness. Thou didst formerly behold me happy, but misfortune has come upon me and my heart must turn away from Amnon on the very day which I hoped would be the most joyful of my life."

Hananel was shocked. "My daughter," he counseled, "trust in God, for in Him alone is salvation," and left the room to seek Thirza and Jedidjah. He advised them to immediately summon a physician and also to procure healing balm from Gilead.

Thamar's sorrow gradually changed into fierce anger, and when the noonday hour came round she seated herself to write a harsh letter to Amnon. Thirza urged her daughter to tell her what had happened, but she said:

"Let me first drive Amnon from God's land, for he is an evil-doer unworthy to dwell in it. Afterwards I will impart to thee the crime which he has committed, and which I did not learn from a stranger but beheld with my own eyes."

Thirza sadly replied:

"Woe to thee, my daughter, because thou hast ever followed the momentary impulse of thy heart, and didst love or hate as thy inclination led! Remember also the benefits which Amnon has conferred upon thee and my father, Hananel."

"Even if Amnon," said Thamar, "were to live a thousand years in virtue and purity, his faultless walk would become swallowed up and concealed in the abyss of his horrible deed. Thou dost verily know, my dear mother, that Amnon

filled all my thoughts, but now a deadly horror comes over me whenever I think of him. Therefore leave me alone with my grief."

While she was thus speaking, Uz came in and addressed her thus:

"My mistress, wilt thou not grant thy bridegroom an answer of peace, for he is eagerly looking for the messenger who shall bring him good tidings?"

"Is he then still in Zion? Does he still venture to wander over the holy soil of Jerusalem? He shall hasten from hence and flee out of the city before the gate is closed upon him, for the sword of vengeance hangs over his head. Tell him the words of his mouth are smoother than oil, but his ways are slippery and covered with darkness."

"God will lead him," said Thirza, "to his appointed place, and the Lord will reward him according to his deeds."

Thamar also said to Uz:

"Depart now; come again at eventide, then I will give thee a letter which thou mayest deliver to him who has deceived and grieved me to the heart."

Uz turned away bitterly disappointed, and betook himself to Amnon's mother to impart to her that her son had fallen into misfortune. When Naomi heard this she wrung her hands saying:

"This grief also had the Lord prepared for me, and he heaps upon me sorrow and misfortune together. Therefore hasten to Amnon, tell him to go quickly to Bethlehem. My daughter and myself will also repair thither, for we shall

find Sithri there." And Naomi and Penina wept bitterly.

However, the way of escape for the poor women was already cut off, for Jedidjah had placed guards at all the gates with orders to arrest them and deliver them to the elders.

CHAPTER XXIII

The Flight

"My heart panted, fearfulness affrighted me, the night of my pleasure hath he turned into fear unto me."—Isaiah xxi, 4.

HE setting sun had gilded the peak of the Mount of Olives with its last rays. Amnon was eagerly expecting the return of Uz and Pura, his messengers. Filled with uneasiness he walked to and from the city. When he reached the spot where the quiet waters of the brook Siloam discharge into the roaring Kedron, he remained standing absorbed in deep thought.

Then he said:

"How lovely are these peaceful waters which flow gently and clear as crystal! The blue of heaven is mirrored on their surface. But whither do they descend? Not to a clean spot, but thither where all that is unclean is cast and buried, into the Vale of Kedron. My thoughts were pure and serene like the waters of Siloam, but they have become disturbed and storm-tossed since misfortune has overtaken me. The days of my tranquillity were of short duration, now the time of calamity has me for its prey. The flowers and the tender plants germinated thoughts of love in my heart, yet I never foresaw that they would grow into giants who would sharpen their swords

in order to cut down all the love and beauty which I had planted therein and had displayed in the time of my purity and innocence. My mind is confused and my heart trembles. Anguish, like a ceaseless, storm-tossed sea, agitates my heart."

Absorbed in such meditations Amnon went hither and thither, and mournfully ascended the Mount of Olives. When he arrived at the linden trees he heard Uz shouting: "Hasten, Amnon!"

Amnon joyfully responded:

"My eyes hang upon thy lips, and my soul listens for the words of thy mouth."

Uz however replied:

"My tongue brings a hard blow, and I hold thy death in my hand."

So saying he delivered to Amnon Thamar's letter together with the bottle of wine which she had sent back to him, and continued:

"Thamar also sent thee this message: 'This letter is one of separation which shall sever our covenant forever. Drink the wine which thou hast spiced for me, then thou wilt forget beauty, sweetness and the pain of love.' After she had spoken these hard words I left her. Maacah hastened after me and said: 'I beseech thee hinder Amnon from drinking this wine. To-morrow I will go to him and impart incredible things, but only this much can I tell to-day—Thamar is completely altered; she is filled with intense hatred toward her bridegroom, and seeks after his life.' "

Amnon then unfolded the letter and read what Thamar had written:

"Like the vine-dresser who returns to gather the gleanings, and as he gathers ears in the unfruitful valley of Ephraim, I also will now return to gather the remnant of our loving words, while God has sent pain and bitter agony upon us. 'My friend; — my chosen; — my bridegroom; — my heart's dearest treasure;'—so I called thee in the days of our felicity, and thou didst name me: 'Thy faithful one;—thy little one;—thine only one;—thine all in the world.' The words of thy mouth were smoother than oil, while thy hands were preparing a grave for me; thy lips were like roses, but the thoughts of thy heart were like thorns. Thus didst thou think to treat thy little dove,—'thine only one.' But now, thou bridegroom of death, let us no longer behave like doves,—no longer discourse of agreeable matters and friendship. No, let us choose the growling speech of bears and the roaring of lions, and do thou listen—unless thy ears are closed like those of a deaf adder—listen to my cry, my shriek, my rage! But what shall I say to thee? Thine ears are deaf and thy heart is obdurate, for thou hast imbibed the milk of snakes and the poison of the vipers of the desert. Where is the Amnon who appeared to me as an angel of deliverance to protect my life from the ravenous lion? Oh, my heart is troubled! It continually asks itself: 'Is the Amnon from Bethlehem, who once saved my life, the same as this sorcerer who now seeks to break my thread of life, as a weaver his woof?' If I were to recount all thine evil deeds, I fear that the Lord would strike the land with ruin and turn it into a wilderness; for thy horrible deeds

cause the throne of God to tremble. Oh, be again, if only for a moment, what thou hast once been to me. Reflect and think to whom thou hast caused all this suffering. Was it not to thine own little dove, thy faithful friend, who would not have relinquished thee for all the kings and princes in the world? I looked upon thee as a tender little plant which had been placed in my heart, and which grew and throve there in happiness. Yet when the fruit appeared thereon, it was more bitter than wormwood. Now I must pluck thee like a sharp arrow from my heart, and the wound will never heal.

"Thou hast crushed me through thine evil deeds; thou hast dashed me to pieces through the falsehood of thy tongue. Thou wouldest not resign the life of thy love to the beasts of prey, but wouldst thyself be her destroyer. Now flee away into the wide world, thou who seekest after my life; hasten thither where the mountains smoke and the seas roar; hide thyself in the lion's den or in the dragon's cave! Yonder will thine evil deeds become known, for thou hast accomplished more terrible things than the wild beasts. The lion loves his mate, the snakes have pity upon their brood, but thou hast torn in pieces the soul of thy benefactress and thy beloved. Flee, thou striped snake! Seek no longer to entice me with thy smooth, serpent-like tongue, but flee and save thy wretched life.

"Why should I behold thy blood streaming upon the ground? Behold, the anger and vengeance of my relatives and defenders are kindled against thee, and if they overtake thee they will

tear thee in pieces. They will show thee no mercy. Dost thou ask me whither to flee before them? Verily thou knowest the way to Sheol. No man with a pure heart will tread it, and so it remains for thee alone. Thou hast already entered upon this road and thou wilt travel farther thereon, until thy soul shall mourn over thee and thou wilt bitterly repent over thy wickedness."

When Amnon had read this letter he tore his hair, rent his garments, and cried from the depths of his heart:

"O woe to this day of unrest and bewilderment, for God has confused our speech as beforetime at Babel! I have poured forth upon Thamar my heart filled with affection and prayer, but she has answered cruelly. She accuses me of sorcery and witchcraft. She imputes crimes to me, and even stamps me as a murderer. My mind begins to be unbalanced; I cannot understand her. Oh, it is impossible for Thamar to act thus! Some vile witches must have slandered me to her and Thamar in her perplexity has believed them. I will go to her and will cast myself to her feet. I will pour out bitter tears before her. Perhaps this will soften her heart."

"Pray, do not," said Uz, "thou wouldst but run into death. Maacah expressly said to me: 'To-morrow I will come to Amnon and impart to him how Thamar has been transformed into a tigress who seeks after his life.' Death lurks in this bottle of wine sent to thee. Would that the evil-doer, herself, had drank the wine."

"Silence, Uz!" cried Amnon, "my ears will

become deaf if I listen to hear you defame her name."

"Go thither then," Uz answered, "if to die by her hand appears so sweet to thee. Yet look before thee, Amnon, lest thou end thy life like an evil-doer. Oh, have mercy upon thyself, and do not surrender thyself to those who seek thy life."

"I will not save my life," Amnon said, "I would rather deliver myself from an existence which has become a burden unto me."

"At least," pleaded Uz, "listen to the voice of thy mother and sister, who through me beseech thee to go to Bethlehem whither they will come afterwards. Thou wilt also find Sithri yonder. He tarries in the house of my master, Abisai."

Amnon stood lost in thought and gave no attention to Uz's counsel. Suddenly he roused himself and said:

"My dear Uz, go now to Thamar, my little dove, and say that her lover awaits her under the lindens, and tearfully longs for her coming. I have very many things to say to her, for that which I have already spoken in the time of our love does not cover the matter."

"Reflect, Amnon, and do not talk like an insane person. Flee, I entreat thee, flee now when the sun has gone down."

"Thou art right," said Amnon. "I must flee to the gates of hell, for my sun has gone down at midday. See, all the little birds return home and find rest, but when will my heart re-

turn home and be at rest? O, let me tarry yet for a little under this olive-tree, on the spot where I rejoiced with my Thamar! Who would ever have said to me that I should rest on this very same place in order to gain strength to flee from her, who then seemed to me the dearest in the world? Woe to the eve of my wedding-day! I expected pleasure, and it became sorrow. To-morrow was to have been the day of our marriage. Look, here they have built me a splendid tent for a bridal apartment, but who will now dwell therein with Thamar? O Jerusalem, thou abiding fortress, and all thy hills which God has created, declare to Thamar that Amnon is no blood-thirsty bridegroom, but a forlorn and innocent man! Peace be upon thee, Jerusalem, with all thy glory. Peace be upon thee, Thamar, thou beautiful one. I cannot be angry with thee, thou loveliest of women. So may God also not enter into judgment upon thee."

While Amnon was thus speaking, Theman appeared riding a swift horse. He dismounted, and said to Amnon:

"Mount this good steed and depart quickly from hence. Otherwise, the sword of justice which hangs over thy head will descend upon thee." Then Theman hurried away without noticing Amnon further, although he called after him.

Amnon then said to Uz:

"Hasten to conduct my mother and sister to Bethlehem where I will meet them, though I fear my stay there will not be of long continuance."

Thereupon he mounted the horse and galloped away.

When Theman returned home he went into Thamar's apartment, and found her still in tears.

"O sister," he said, "forget thine intimacy with Amnon, and be prepared to receive Azrikam whom God has appointed for thee and to whom our father has also promised thee. The elders will gather here this evening, and Azrikam will betroth himself to thee in their presence."

But Hananel, who had entered and heard these words, interposed.

"No, my daughter," he declared, "I have not relinquished my wealth for Azrikam. Theman's counsel will have no weight with me, and what he proposes will never come to pass."

Thamar threw herself into Hananel's arms.

"My father, protect me, I beseech thee, from Azrikam," she pleaded. "Let him not over-power me in the day of my affliction. He shall not think: 'Now Thamar will love me when her anger burns against Amnon,' for I have always hated him, and to all eternity shall abhor his image. Only one man have I found, and now when he has become faithless to me, henceforth I love no other on the earth."

"Who knows?" returned Hananel. "Perhaps Amnon's guilt may not be as great as thy father thinks, for how could such a brave and faithful youth so suddenly become such an arrant villain. The two women have been arrested and will shortly be brought here, where they will be examined by the elders. Then the whole matter will be brought to light."

Thirza also came in and spoke soothingly to Thamar.

"The daughters of the evil one have now arrived," she said. "No wonder that Amnon became enticed by the maiden, for she is as beautiful as a daughter of God. I have never before beheld so handsome a maiden." Thamar shuddered, but Theman became completely bewildered.

"Where is Maacah?" asked Thamar in her confusion. Maacah, however, had left the city in order to follow Amnon through the darkness of the night.

CHAPTER XXIV

The God of Vengeance

IN one of the rooms of Jedidjah's house, sorrowfully stood Naomi and Penina. The mother's countenance was uncovered, but the maiden's face was closely veiled. The guards who had arrested them were watching them. Jedidjah sent for Thamar and Theman to go into the public apartment, and requested a servant to call Zimri thither.

On entering, Thamar gazed with fear and trembling upon the two women, and turned to Jedidjah:

"O father," she said, "this is the merciless mother and her blood-thirsty daughter who succeeded in entangling in their net the man dearer to me than all others; they also mixed the poison wine for me in the Vale of Tophet. Could it not suffice them to have seduced my bridegroom's heart? Must they also seek after my life?"

Naomi wrung her hands when she heard these words, but she remained silently weeping. Theman meanwhile gazed with tearful eyes upon the Rose of Carmel, but his lips also remained dumb.

Jedidjah then arose and addressed the two women:

"Tell me, ye daughters, who have made your God to tremble with your sins, have you really known Amnon before yesterday?"

"Verily, if wicked, malicious men have spread abroad such horrible lies concerning us," Penina answered, "then take my young life that I may not live longer on this earth which is corrupted by its inhabitants, yet spare my mother."

Zimri now appeared. He trembled when he espied the two women. Jedidjah however said to him:

"Be not afraid of them," said Jedidjah, "for even if they have the ability to perform great things and to create horrors in the Vale of Tophet, they have no power here."

Zimri then turned to the two women:

"Listen to me, ye women, and harken to my voice. God has created the earth with truth. He has stretched abroad the heavens above with justice. The man who is truthful walks through life safely, and with grace and truth will God forgive his sins. Therefore, sow truth that ye may reap grace."

"Bring forward, my lord, the man who has so basely accused me," cried Naomi. "Let him testify of my sin before my face, for as yet I know not why we have been brought hither, nor what is our offense before God."

"Be silent!" said Thamar excitedly. "Blaspheme not God's holy name, nor take it upon thy unholy lips. Be silent, or call upon Satan. Mutter thine incantations, conjure up the spirits of the

kingdom of death, use thy black art, summon thy witches—perhaps thou wilt therewith ascertain thy sins and the man who accuses thee?"

Hananel now questioned the woman:

"Where then is Amnon? If ye are acquainted with him why do ye deny it? Tell me, thou charming maiden, hast thou really led him away? Answer truly, for here a lie will avail thee naught."

Penina lifted up her voice and wept:

"The Lord God must fight my battle. He shall be my champion, for I find no help from man."

Jedidjah then said to the guards:

"Confine these two reprobates in the upper room where Amnon formerly abode until the elders assemble here and we obtain the truth of the matter." But he said to a servant: "Go, call Azrikam hither."

"O, my father," cried Thamar, "have mercy upon me; do not deliver me into the hands of that abominable fiend."

Jedidjah answered:

"Behold, my daughter, these are the fruits of thy wilfulness and capriciousness."

"Pura shall be called hither," declared Hananel, "and above all Amnon shall be here to stand before his accusers. He will certainly be able to explain his actions."

The guards removed the two women and shut them up in the upper room. The servants, however, went to call Azrikam.

Not long after the door of the house opened and the venerable Abisai entered leaning upon the arm of his brother Sithri. He greeted Jedidjah and asked after his health and that of his family. Jedidjah replied that all were well, adding the customary greeting: "Peace be with thee,"—yet his countenance was sad and gloomy.

"Behold," said Abisai, "I was dangerously ill, but now God has raised me up again. I have come hither in order that to-morrow, the great day of rejoicing when thou shalt celebrate Amnon's marriage with Thamar, I may share thy joy."

"Behold, thou art stricken in years," replied Jedidjah, "and hast already endured much, yet thou hast come hither to-day to see that which will astonish thee. Thou hast come to rejoice at Amnon's wedding. Lo, satyrs dance in his bridal garment, while death and savage beasts shout and sing wedding songs at his table!"

Sithri in astonishment said:

"What art thou saying?"

Jedidjah explained:

"Amnon was brought up by thee, and yet he has never confided to thee that he has chosen for his paramour a maiden who has authority in the wilderness, authority in the moaning desert, and at whose command all hell quakes."

"God must then have so overturned the upper and lower worlds that the angels of God have descended to hell, while the accursed of God have ascended to heaven," was Sithri's response.

"Is it not enough," said Jedidjah, "that such an 'accursed of God' should have stolen into a

peaceful house in order to create confusion and unhappiness, and to destroy all our tranquillity?"

Sithri interposed.

"Thy lips speak fearful things and thou dost force me to answer thee. I have told thee before that thy blind belief in man's integrity was foolishness and prolific of evil. But now thou hast fallen into the opposite error and sayest that Amnon has destroyed the peace of thy house. Therefore listen, my lord, to what I say unto thee. There are three evil beings who destroy the peace of the land. Two of them go about openly and the righteous will escape them, but the third sneaks around in the darkness of night like the pestilence and the upright become his prey. When the enemy is in the land and our cities are affrighted by the might of his hosts, our strength rests in God. He will protect us and silence the tumult of the invaders. And when wanton miscreants stretch out their hands in open violation of the law and seek to destroy the peace of God's city, then our judges in the spirit of integrity will annihilate them and exterminate the wicked from the gates of Zion. The sword does not rage forever, and the hand of the guilty does not do evil always. The sword returns to its sheath, and the outstretched arm of the wicked will be broken. Sooner or later peace will be established. Yet, as long as the earth remains, craft and hypocrisy will seek to lurk and to search out the peaceful habitations; and so long as the Lord in His long-suffering permits them to rule, the sword of justice cannot reach them.

"For while they apparently walk in the path of justice, they contrive evil and wickedness without being detected. They resemble the striped snakes which look beautiful with their greenish, golden scales, and which hide among the flowers, but sting the unsuspecting traveler in the heel unless he perceives them. Like the snake hidden under the roses, these hypocrites conceal craft and hypocrisy behind an outward observance of laws and commandments. Our forefathers had no penalty for this two-fold sin. Therefore Jedidjah, my master and friend, do not pronounce Amnon guilty before thou hast sought out and investigated the character of his enemies who have proclaimed his sins. For these envious ones without thy knowledge have created the confusion in thy house."

"The words of this man are forcible," said Hananel, "but why is not Amnon present to corroborate them?"

"He has heard of Abisai's illness," replied Sithri, "and has probably gone to visit him at Bethlehem."

Jedidjah immediately ordered two servants to ride to Bethlehem and bring Amnon back. He said to Zimri:

"Now thou wilt have an opportunity to testify to Amnon's sins before his face."

Zimri was troubled beyond measure, yet he sought to conceal his embarrassment by answering:

"Pardon the question, my lord, but why hast thou not placed strict watch over the two women and investigated the matter in order to ascertain

if they have any relatives, and what business they have here? I have heard much about them, and am prepared to bring both old and new evidence before the elders."

* * *

Heavy clouds swept over the heavens, and thick darkness covered the City of God. The inhabitants were lost in peaceful slumber. All was still save only from time to time one heard the voice of the watchman of the tower, as he cried in the words of the royal singer:

"Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep!"

The city watchmen also, as they traversed the streets, sang their hymn:

When the conscience is at rest,
Sleep will be by angels blest
With the light of happy dreams;
But dark horror enters sleep
When the wicked slumber deep,
Ere wakened by the sun's bright beams.

Two watchmen met as they came from opposite directions; said one to the other:

"Lift up thine eyes to the north, and see where yonder a column of fire flashes up and anon sinks down again."

"Thou hast seen aright," answered the other. "A column of smoke arises from the northern part of the city. Away! let us hasten to help."

Several guards were passing through a narrow side street, when they heard a voice saying:

"My sword has struck her in the heart, and they also who desired to ruin me will shortly be consumed in the flames. Yet, I tremble in all my limbs. An unaccountable fear overwhelms me. The walls of the city approach each other,—they press upon me—they will stifle me! The towers shake and seem like giants! Like the wild deer or the jackal, I wander through the night. The heavens threaten me,—the earth trembles under my feet, and the wind howls with a frightful voice in my ears, crying: 'Away, thou unclean one, —hasten from hence!' Alas, I am unclean, for my mother's blood drips from my hand, and all the fountains of the deep cannot wash it away, and all the many waters of the ocean cannot extinguish the fire which I built for my father! But whither shall I go? What will become of me? With shame and disgrace I go to my death."

"Thou hast spoken truly and what thou hast foretold will speedily come to pass," said one of the guards, while the others seized the man who had uttered these strange words.

"Thine own lips," said another, "have testified against thee. Now tell us who art thou. Thou wilt doubtless seek to conceal thy crimes by night, but the darkness will cover them for a short time only. When the sun rises all the misdeeds of the night will be revealed."

While they were thus speaking, the watchmen returned from the scene of the fire, and said:

"A great calamity has occurred in the city, —a hellish fire, the work of an incendiary."

The guards replied:

"A night-wolf has fallen into our hands, but he has become as dumb as a lamb and will not tell us who he is; yet, we have listened to the terrible words which fell from his lips. We will now take him to Jedidjah's house, for the elders are assembled there, and the bodies of the unfortunate ones will also be brought thither."

The elders sat on their benches in the dignity of their office. Zimri stood before them and related what he had seen in the Valley of Tophet. The two women stood in wonder, they sighed and wrung their hands, but could find no words with which to refute his falsehoods. Thamar also sat behind a curtain in the next room, and was likewise astonished over what she heard.

Behold, Azrikam was led into the house; when he beheld Zimri, he released himself from the grasp of the guards who had arrested him, drew forth a dagger and thrust it into the hypocrite's side, saying:

"This be thy reward, Zimri, for thy tasks this night. Instead of silver I bring thee iron."

"Murder! Murder!" shrieked the elders, but Azrikam brandished his bloody blade over Naomi and Penina, for he was like a lunatic impelled by an evil spirit. Theman hastened quickly, caught him by the back of the neck and threw him to the ground. The officers wrested the weapon from him, and at the command of the elders bound him.

Thamar entered from the next room and shuddered at the scenes which met her eyes. Zimri, struck by death, shrieked:

"O, woe is me, Amnon is the upright one, and Azrikam and I are the evil-doers."

Thamar started when she heard this. Abisai and Sithri were astounded. Then there arose a great clamor in the street, and the guards shouted:

"The bodies of those whom Azrikam has slain to-day have been brought hither."

The door again opened and Achan's sons rushed in, wringing their hands and crying:

"Our brother Nabal has committed murder. He decoyed our father and Chepher and Bukjah into a hut, shut them in and set fire to the building. When our mother Helah went to his deliverance, he, Azrikam, pierced her heart with his sword."

"Who then is this Nabal, and where is he?" asked the wondering bystanders.

The children of Achan replied:

"Here he stands,—this reprobate, this monster!—the son of our father and our mother, called Azrikam-ben-Joram."

The elders lifted up their voices and commanded that the bodies of the unfortunate ones should be brought in.

Achan's children said:

"There yet remains a breath of life in our father and also in Chepher and Bukjah, whom we rescued like smoking firebrands from the flames."

The guards carried Achan, Chepher, Bukjah and Helah into Jedidjah's house. Helah was dead. Achan and the two villains were not entirely consumed, but their entire bodies were blistered and looked like burnished brass. When

they were laid on the beds, they screamed aloud in their agony.

"Oh," shrieked Achan, "the Eternal is a just God, and now rewards me for my evil deeds! Eighteen years ago Judge Mattan persuaded me to set fire to the house of my mistress, Hagith, whom he hated. I followed his wicked suggestion and suffered her with her three children to be consumed in the flames. I substituted my son Nabal for the Azrikam who perished, and imputed the guilt of the incendiarism to my master's innocent wife, the good and gentle Naomi."

Chepher and Bukjah likewise lifted up their voices and cried:

"The weapon which we threw has recoiled and wounded us; for we had a hand in these shameful deeds. We emptied Joram's treasure chamber and deposited the treasure in Mattan's house. We testified falsely before the elders regarding Naomi, and have covered her name with disgrace and her memory with infamy. Afterwards we also burned Mattan's house, when an evil spirit had come upon him and he had begun to speak of these things which we wished should remain untold."

"Alas!" continued Achan, "the delicate Naomi and her daughter dwell in a miserable hut at the Valley Gate. Call them hither and let them return to their heritage."

Zimri also moaned and cried out, saying:

"Woe is me! I have borne false witness against Amnon and these two women, whom I have seen to-day for the first time in my life."

Then convulsions seized him and he became speechless.

Theman and Thamar were amazed, while Jedidjah and Thirza shook their heads. Then Thamar said to Theman:

"I am not surprised that Amnon loved Joram's daughter, for she is so beautiful and moreover is such an unfortunate maiden. He was innocent. What shall I now do?"

Thirza drew near to Naomi, lifted her veil, and they remained weeping in each other's arms without speaking a word. Jedidjah still stood like one utterly confounded, but Hananel inquired:

"Where now is Amnon, who released me from prison and whom I have made heir to my possessions?"

At last Jedidjah addressed Naomi:

"Thou worthy wife of my friend Joram, behold, God has planned through fire and sword to bring thine innocence to light, but He has covered my countenance with shame, for I have publicly wronged thee. Yet I did it ignorantly."

Then Theman fell at his father's feet, and entreated:

"Father, have pity upon thy son."

Jedidjah lifted him up and said:

"What aileth thee, my son?"

"This is the maiden," said Theman, "whom I have loved for a long time, and my love is stronger than death. She also loved me, yet she feared on account of the violence of the conspirators, and I knew not who these were. Shameful slanderers have even charged her with sins, and

I myself have been among her enemies. But why do I say 'among her enemies'?—'among my enemies,' should I say rather, for she is my life and soul, and without her I am nothing."

Naomi, however, interrupted him:

"Now is not the time for love-making, but rather to drive away our enemies. Yet tell me, beloved Thamar, what evil didst thou find in my daughter and myself that thou didst call us 'accursed women?'"

Thamar answered:

"I loved Amnon with the whole affection of my heart, and when I perceived that thy daughter had also won his heart, jealousy burned within me and distracted my soul. But now I would give much if I might abide with thy lovely daughter. We might both live in harmony as Amnon's wives."

Sithri then stepped forth and said:

"O, thou maiden, whose heart is ever too hasty to exalt, or to humble itself without thought, without questioning. Could the daughter of Joram become the wife of a youth of no higher position than that of a shepherd? Therefore, listen, thou affectionate, but over-hasty daughter of a Prince, and give attention to what is now said, for I will give thee the key to all these riddles. Amnon and Penina are twins. They are brother and sister, and are the children of Joram's wife, Naomi. Amnon was brought up by my brother Abisai as a shepherd, but Penina dwelt with her mother. She gleaned in the fields of her father and gathered the grapes in his vineyards, and on account of her great beauty all the

inhabitants of the region called her Susanna, the Rose of Carmel."

"Mother! Sister!" exclaimed Thamar, as she alternately embraced first Naomi and then Penina. She uttered no other word, but fell fainting. Jedidjah and Thirza, who were greatly astounded at what had taken place, carried her to her own apartment and placed her on her couch.

Then Naomi said to Theman:

"My son, send forth horsemen to bring my son Amnon back from Bethlehem," and he promised to obey her command.

The elders, who had beheld in amazement the scenes in Jedidjah's house, now went from thence each to his own dwelling.

Zimri meanwhile lay in his struggle with death, and his eyes fell upon Azrikam who lay bound with strong cords. He strove to speak, but his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth and nothing was heard save the rattle in his throat.

"Who mixed the snake poison in the wine?" demanded Azrikam. "Who counseled me to perform all my evil deeds? It is thou, Zimri, and thou hast brought thyself into a strait which will be of no advantage to thee."

Theman, before leaving, also mocked the sufferer, saying:

"O, Zimri, thou innocent, righteous man, how dumb art thou now and how bowed down with pain! Thou hearest Nabal's reproaches and givest him no answer. O, thou pure in heart, who didst offer thyself to God with thy every word, with thy every look, why hast thou to-day so grievously sinned? Thou hast brought men

as whole-offerings and hast allowed them to be utterly consumed. Glare at me now with thine eyes, thou deaf snake, shortly they will moulder in their sockets, and thy viper's tongue will become dust, and thou wilt perform no more unholy deeds. As a dead fly defiles the precious ointment, so hast thou with thy vile tongue defiled God's heritage. Thou hast turned roses into wormwood, and Eden into Sheol. Therefore, go down to thy death with a broken heart, for the bitterness thou hast created for us, God has turned into sweetness."

"Now, my son," said Naomi to Theman, "thou dost understand the words which I spake unto thee in the Vale of Tophet, which then sounded to thee like riddles. Thine eyes have now seen how the thorns distressed the rose on every side. The thorns have now been burned. They have suffered death for their grievous sins. This miserable Nabal sought to ensnare my daughter and to seat her on her father's inheritance, which, however, did not belong to him. But when he perceived that she did not fear him, he sought to destroy her life with his sword."

"Alas!" cried Nabal, "my name will become horrible to me. Theman, we have grown up together and were playmates in our youth, although we have never had much affection for each other. I am innocent of many of the sins which have been laid to my charge. Therefore, be merciful, draw thy sword and slay me. This is the first and last token of friendship which I have ever asked from thee. It is enough to reap shame where I expected honor. My life will be only a

disgrace to me, therefore lift up thy hand and make an end of me."

"No, thou loathsome reptile," was Theman's reply. "I will not soil my blade with thy blood. The oxen and the wild beasts shall tread thee underfoot. Thou shalt become the prey of the jackals of the desert."

Thirza now entered the room and said to Theman:

"My son, give orders that these accursed of God be removed from our house."

Theman acted in accordance with his mother's command, but he delivered Nabal into the hands of Achan's sons to be dealt with as they chose.

Thirza invited Naomi and Penina into Thamar's apartment, for she had now recovered from her swoon. She embraced Naomi, saying:

"Verily, Satan must have ascended from the depths of hell in order to carry on this mockery with us. If I had known all these things before, my friend would not have departed to a far country. Pardon me for having unwittingly wronged you both."

Naomi and Penina wept at these words of Thamar, while she continued:

"The Lord hath now wiped away your tears and hath exalted your horn again, but who can comprehend my pain? I already loved Amnon with my whole heart, while I looked upon him as a low-born shepherd. Shall I not now despair when I have learned that I have estranged the son of Joram, the prince of Judea, my youthful prince? Woe is me! I drove him away in my

ignorance of all this. Who knows if he will ever again return to me?"

Jedidjah now said to Sithri:

"Thou art right, my old friend, and I am ashamed. This night has revealed my folly, and the remembrance thereof will be a solemn warning to me during my whole life. I have never heeded thy teaching, and would never believe what thou didst say to me regarding men. Zimri has taught me this night that a raging fire, a roaring flood, a ferocious wild beast cannot produce so great harm as a crafty, malicious man who dissembles and assumes the garb of virtue. Fearful is thy vengeance, wonderful is thy judgment, O Lord!"

Hananel sighed:

"If only Amnon were back, he would comfort us in our trouble. All my dreams will come to pass. Amnon will return again to us and regain Joram's inheritance. I am as certain of this as I am of the existence of God. Do you, ye women, hold yourselves in readiness to return to your inheritance, which has for so long a time been the spoil of strangers."

"O that out of all this suffering," exclaimed Theman, "joy might bloom for us and the sapphire remain in the ring!"

"When Amnon returns again," said Naomi, "may your hearts be united."

The bystanders were astonished at this conversation, for they could not understand its significance. Theman then related all that had happened to him from the day he went to Carmel until the present time.

"Verily," said Jedidjah, "God's hand has manifested itself in my love to my faithful friend Joram, and the Lord has also confirmed our covenant by the love of our children. Do thou, beloved Naomi, henceforth abide with thy lovely daughter in thine inheritance. May the God who has fought thy battles be also the defender of Zion, so that Assur may not terrify us, and may He clear away the clouds from His Holy City."

"Thy righteousness," exclaimed Thamar, "has gone forth like the noonday sun. O that the sun might soon shine again upon me! May the footmen and messengers speedily return and bring back Amnon, my bridegroom. I know he will forgive me, for my love for him is stronger than death; therefore my jealousy was also fierce as hell."

* * *

The night of horrors had passed away. It had rolled over the evil-doers, and when the morning appeared they were no more. In unspeakable agonies they had given up the ghost. Nabal had perished at the hands of his brothers, who thus avenged their parents' murder.

At noon of this day Jedidjah's children and others of his household escorted Naomi to her inheritance. They separated with tears and caresses. Sithri and Abisai, however, were persuaded to remain with the women during this time of distress. For the City of God trembled before Sennacherib, who already, according to reliable in-

formation, had crossed the Euphrates, and the inhabitants were busily fortifying the city.

The mounted messengers returned towards evening, and reported to Jedidjah:

"We came to Bethlehem and inquired for Amnon. A shepherd told us: 'Amnon abode with us for a night, and waited in vain for his mother and sister. He wrote words on paper and wept bitterly. Afterwards he handed us the writing, and urgently entreated us to deliver the same to Thamar, Jedidjah's daughter. Before the break of day he went on his chosen way, but he confided his destination to none of us.'" The messenger, having delivered the letter to Jedidjah, continued: "The shepherds seized Pura, Amnon's lad, who had overpowered Maacah on the plains of Bethlehem, and had nearly murdered her. She is seriously injured, and her soul is not far from the grave."

Jedidjah read the letter with tearful eyes, and then charged the messengers, saying:

"Speak with no one concerning these matters, for if Thamar were to ascertain the truth, she would die from sorrow. Tell her you have learned that Amnon is in company with the princes of Judea, and has fled with them to Tarsus."

The messengers replied:

"It shall be done according to thy wishes."

At that moment Thamar entered the room. Jedidjah hastily concealed the letter.

"What aileth thee, father?" she asked. "Why is thy countenance tear-stained?"

"Ask the messengers, my daughter, they will tell the reason." They then told Thamar the tale which Jedidjah had put into their mouths.

She wrung her hands, exclaiming:

"Alas! my father, how unhappy I am!"

Jedidjah sought to turn her attention from her troubles:

"Be not so downcast, my child; lament not over the fugitives but instead weep for those who remain in Zion, for their life is in jeopardy. Were it better to dwell with thy chosen in this time of siege and suffering? Trust in God who protects those who love Him, and when the danger is over He will return Amnon with the fugitives from Judea."

He talked encouragingly to her for a long time; Abisai and Hananel also sought to console her, but all their consolation availed nothing. Only the universal misery of the fatherland could gradually alleviate her personal suffering.

They also visited Maacah and listened to her story:

"I know that I must soon die. Why then should I continue to deceive? I have loved Amnon since the first time I saw him. But when I found I had no hope of ever winning him, I joined his adversaries and also instigated Pura, who loved me, to spread abroad evil reports concerning Amnon and thus bring him into bad repute. When the adversaries had carried out their purposes, and Amnon had fled, I followed him. I did not know that Pura was watching me. Alas! he pursued me, and would soon have ended my life with his fearful blows had not the shepherds

rescued me from his hands. But his abuse was deadly, and I shall soon be no more. The blood which I helped to spill has returned upon my own head."

Pura was also interviewed, and he confirmed Maacah's statement. Meanwhile he was put in prison until sentence should be passed upon him.

CHAPTER XXV

The Heathen at the Gates

GREAT distress and confusion was in the City of God. The cries of the hungry, the blows of the axes and hammers which broke down the walls of the houses in order to strengthen the walls of the city therewith, resounded on all sides. Horror was written on every countenance, everywhere gloom abounded, for Zion was now besieged and almost overcome by the strangers.

Hezekiah had gathered together twelve thousand faithful and courageous men, had divided them into companies and appointed captains and generals. These he collected near the city gates and addressed them:

"Harken to me, ye children of Zion. Behold, a great people come against us with the clashing of weapons, in order to besiege Jerusalem. Yet be not affrighted before their power, nor dismayed before their number, for the arm of the Eternal is with us. Therefore carry God's fear on your countenance, and God's love in your hearts. Hope in God! Wait for his salvation, for he will work wonders when we are not expecting them. Is not this Zion, the strong city to whom those look who dwell at the ends of the earth, and on the isles of the sea? The destiny

of the nations rests in her bosom, and from her, judgment goes forth unto all lands. She will be delivered. Then all the people of the earth shall rejoice. From every land praise shall arise, and they shall joy and be glad in the God of Zion. Therefore fear not, ye men of Judea, for your deliverer is mighty. His name is Jehovah Sabaoth, the Lord of Hosts!"

Sebna, however, excited dissensions in the city and deluded the inhabitants. Thirteen thousand traitors and cowards joined them. He likewise gathered his followers together and addressed them:

"Whosoever desireth life let him listen to my counsel, and conclude peace with the King of Assyria before he comes hither and turns Jerusalem into a heap of ruins whereon grass will grow. Hezekiah has vainly sought to obtain the means to save the city, and the labor which he has spent on strengthening her walls is fruitless, for they are full of rifts and clefts. Jerusalem resembles a man who, from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet, is covered with boils, and to whom there comes a foolish physician who orders him to take flesh from his body in order to heal his wounds. Truly they destroy beautiful palaces and break dwelling-houses in pieces, but the stones cry out of the walls and the beams of the rafters answer them. Do they think to fortify the city and to repair her rifts therewith? Zion's gates are closed, but the doors of the realm of shades are wide open for us! Ye have collected the waters in the ditches, but the floods of the great ditch, which is called Assyria, will

overflow you with a thundering tumult and will mightily overwhelm Jerusalem.

"If to-day you arrive at no decision to-morrow you will rest in death, for no ransom money will aid you when the day of wrath appears. Rabshaka, the commander of the Assyrian army, has given us one warning; we shall not have another. There remains to us no other alternative but to submit to this great and powerful ruler. Consider what the hopes are whereon Hezekiah supports himself. Does he rely in some measure upon his treasure? You can see that his means are already nearly exhausted, and he will hardly be able to feed his people during the long siege; for he has already used nearly all the silver in the treasury, and even the doors of the Temple have been hewn down in order to purchase peace from Sennacherib. Does he rely upon the strength of his forces? Ascend your roofs, gaze upon the Assyrian hosts which are more numerous than the stars in the heavens! That sight alone would cause the allies to sink in the dust, together with those of whom he to-day boasts. We have sent to Egypt for help and we have despatched messengers to Zoar, but our hope has become shame for the Egyptians are women-hearted. The cities and fortresses of Judah have fallen, and our princes have flown away like little birds who have been frightened from their peaceful nests. Those who remain are weak, aged people who will die in their beds from starvation, and those who were clad in silk will languish on the street. The wan, hollow-eyed ghost of famine reigns, and the hungry feed upon refuse, for even

the beasts have perished. Finally the distress has become so great that delicate mothers devour their little ones! Verily, neither power, wisdom, nor prudence can withstand the Assyrian king. Who has ever come out safely from a battle with him?"

During this time of calamity, Naomi and Penina dwelt in their palace on Joram's estate, and Jedidjah supplied them with food. Theman and Thamar often visited them. One day when Theman entered Penina's apartment, he found her in a very discouraged mood and with a tear-stained face.

"God be with thee," he said, "thou prince's daughter. Thine eyes are like the sun, and they shine as the moon when it breaks through the clouds, but thy tears are like the dew-drops on a bed of pinks."

Penina sighed:

"O, my lord, how unhappy I am!"

"Call me not lord, thou beautiful one," continued Theman, "I am thy slave, for thou hast captured my heart and I belong to thee alone. Lo, Achan, the source of all evil deeds, has become a fountain of salvation and redemption for thee; for now thy descent has been revealed, and thy name shines like the sun when the winged-doors of the night are thrown open and it comes forth in radiant glory."

Penina thoughtfully replied:

"Truly I am the daughter of a prince whose name was renowned in the gates of Zion. But where is my father and what was his fate? Untold sorrow and a sad death far from his home!

The estate of my mother is solitude and widowhood, the fate of my brother is exile and punishment. Pain, weeping and endless sorrow fill my cup. How can my name shine pure and bright when it has lain in the dust from my childhood, and how shall I rejoice over that which causes me continual sorrow? Truly God's hand rests heavily upon my father's house. What have I yet to hope for? Behold, the powerful ruler of a strange people encompasses the city, therefore the daughters of Zion must despair and seek shelter in the arms of their fathers and brothers. But where is my father who should protect me? Where is my brother who should save his sister from the enemy and protect her honor from disgrace? When I reflect upon all this, should I not weep and mourn?"

"O, thou art truly a sorceress," cried Theman, without removing his eyes from her while she spoke. "Verily, a sweet, seducing sorcery dwells on thy lips. Thy gentle heart is anxious for thy brother Amnon, whom I also call my brother. If thou hadst seen how friendly we were, how we were always together, then thou wouldst understand that I share thy grief about him. Amnon is far away, and no weeping nor lamentation can bring him back. O, permit me to be thy brother in this time of need, and more than a brother when the day of deliverance returns to Zion. Only say that thou wilt be my sister and I shall feel the strength of a hero within me. O, look upon me with thy lovely eyes and I shall become the bravest of men. Then, were all the mighty men of Assyria to come hither, I

would tread them under-foot and tear them in pieces as a ravenous lion rends a hind, or as a lioness tears in pieces one who seeks to deprive her of her young. I will be a firm defense and a partition wall between thee and every peril. The arrows of Assur may fly over my head, but I will mind them no more than the raindrops; the bows and quivers of the sons of Elam shall terrify me no more than do the falling leaves. O tell me, thou charming one, that thou wilt be my sister and I will go forth with power and gird myself with strength."

Penina sadly replied:

"I have no strength in myself, how then shall I impart strength to thee? Why dost thou reveal thy wishes to such a sorrowful maiden? Thy heart will melt at my tears, and thine arms will weaken at my sighs."

"Verily, what kind of a wish did my heart reveal to thee?" said Theman. "It is the sum of all my wishes, and my hopes and my desires cannot out-weigh it. Behold, the jealous thorns which formerly surrounded the Rose of Carmel have been burned. Why should my hand not pluck the rose? O give me back, thou sweet one, that which thou didst steal from me! Give me back my peace of heart, and the Lord will bestow upon thee the joy of his salvation."

Naomi, who had now entered, said:

"Thou dost afflict thyself and art anxious over that which is still far distant. Thou shouldst the rather weep over the afflictions of God's city and over Amnon who has departed hence, never perhaps to return. Therefore I cannot

alter my decision. If the Lord is gracious to the house of Joram, and does not suffer the glimmering spark of his race to expire, then he will also bring back the wanderer, and the covenant between Joram and Jedidjah shall be fulfilled. But if God shall destroy this holy covenant and Amnon does not return, then the sapphire shall remain forever broken from the ring. Therefore, Theman, abide meanwhile in thy father's house, for why wilt thou make my daughter's life burdensome with thy unfulfilled desire? Art thou not a man? Therefore overcome thy sorrow, and meanwhile harden thy heart against Penina. Perhaps then God, when he again pours out his grace over the remnant of Judah, may have regard to thy distress and bring everything to a happy conclusion."

Theman sorrowfully replied:

"My whole life and being rest in Penina, and in her eyes alone do I behold the whole world and the fulness thereof. If I should hide myself from her countenance, then my way would be hidden from God and my light would become darkness. I am like a man who has neither help nor power, and my heart is like that of a woman discouraged and full of lamentation. Like Thamar, my sister, like Penina, my heart's beloved, I have become acquainted with sorrow. We three loved Amnon, and now we weep and mourn over his loss."

Theman uttered this amid sobs, and the shining tears ran down Penina's cheeks. Naomi was filled with grief, but she concealed her unhappiness as far as possible. After this Theman

ceased his visits to Penina and remained at home. He often mentioned her name to Thamar, and they mourned together and spoke often of Amnon, the innocent cause of their troubles.

CHAPTER XXVI

In Captivity

URING the eventful night when Amnon vainly waited at Bethlehem for the coming of his mother and sister, he departed and arrived the next morning at Aseka. Here he joined a company of fugitives who were on their way to Egypt. When the caravan drew near the city of Ekron they were overcome by a band of Philistine robbers, taken prisoners and sold to some Greek merchants, who carried the children of Israel in their ships to Cyprus, one of the Ionian isles. Here these bondservants became vine-dressers and wine-pressers in the vineyards. They found on this island a man from Judea, who had been captured in the time of Ahaz, and whom an Ionian had appointed overseer for the people of his own language, because they had no knowledge of the Greek tongue.

The prisoners worked on a lovely mountain by the seashore, the summit of which was crowned with a garland of blooming vineyards. Its outlook upon the sea gave the mountain a remarkable charm. Amnon, however, did not rejoice over the beautiful scenery which surrounded him. He thought of Zion and his beloved, while his heart was filled with grief. He resembled a young olive-tree torn from the fertile

soil where it belonged and transplanted into dry, salty earth where its leaves withered and its beauty vanished.

* * *

Spring had again returned, and the time of labor in the vineyards had come. The children of Judah went up to their master's vineyards to trim and dress the vine. Amnon kept himself apart from the others and shed bitter tears as he worked.

The overseer spoke words of encouragement:

"Lo! spring has again renewed the face of the earth; thou likewise must show us a new and cheerful countenance and must take fresh courage. Verily, thou art yet a young man. Why dost thou go about so bowed down? Spring, to be sure, does not bring back youth to a man like me, but a youth like thee renews his strength and vigor with every spring-time. Behold, thou hast found favor in the eyes of the owner of his vineyard, and I also love thee with two-fold affection, both on account of thy handsome figure and because, as I am told, thou art from Zion, the city to which my whole heart clings."

"Truly, I am young in years," replied Amnon, "yet many old people have not experienced all the sorrow and unhappiness which I have suffered. I am separated from my dearest friend, and from my sweet mother and my lovely sister. Now I am also in imprisonment. Woe is me! Who will intercede for my release? Who will

wipe away my tears? I relate my troubles to the winds and disclose my unhappiness to the waves, whose roaring and tossing mingle with my moans. How can I find consolation in the loveliness of spring? Her mild breezes bring no balm to those to whom weary days are allotted; the sunshine brings no brightness to embittered hearts. The earth may array herself in all her glory, yet can I find pleasure in the flowers of the valley when my own dearly beloved flowers lie buried in the dust? O, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly to the mountain of Zion. I would seize my beloved and bear her to the ends of the earth, to a place where no slanderers and hypocrites dwell. There I could speak to her and she would listen; she would behold my tears and have faith in my words. But if the walls of Jerusalem have already fallen, if my beloved be dead and buried among the ruins, then I would wander about the demolished city. I would seat myself amid the ruins of her temple and her palaces to weep over my unfortunate fatherland and its slaughtered inhabitants. I would mourn and lament over all who were once dear to me until my spirit departed."

"I feel intense sympathy with thee in thy sorrow," said the overseer to Amnon, "yet if thou wert to learn all the trouble that has overtaken me in my life, thou wouldst not mention thine. Once I occupied a high position in my fatherland. I dwelt at ease in my ivory palace, while the blessing of God rested upon all my deeds. I also knew the bliss and tenderness of love. Now, behold, how I drag out my days in a far country

and how sadly the end of life has been ordered! Nineteen years have I already spent in lowliness on a foreign soil. Here has God visited me in the land of my pain and thirst, and in Zion also the hand of God rested heavily on my house. A fire destroyed the dwelling of one of my wives. She and her children miserably perished therein. By this misfortune I became utterly ruined. A horror seizes me when I think of my other wife, whom I so dearly loved and who became unfaithful to me. These things were related to me ten years ago by some wanderers from Judea. Since that time I have known no rest. Yet why should I longer conceal myself from thee? Hast thou never heard any one speak of Joram, the prince? Behold, he stands before thee in his pain and sorrow!"

Amnon upon hearing this sprang up, gazed intently upon the old man, then grew pale from horror and his strength almost failed him. He felt the utmost pity for this man who had fallen so low, who had been hurled down from the height of splendor into the deep sea of misfortune. At the same time he trembled at the thought that the father of Azrikam, his deadly enemy, stood before him.

"Art thou so astonished," said Joram, "that thou art dumb? A man cometh into this world, and God exalteth and abaseth him according to his own good pleasure."

Amnon sighed and answered:

"How plain and powerful do the words of my dear friend remain in my memory! She also said: 'What man can view life and death so near

each other without trembling?' But now I behold elevation and abasement side by side, and my mind is benumbed. Art thou truly Joram whose memory is still cherished in the gates of Jerusalem?"

Then Joram questioned him concerning the welfare of his faithful friend Jedidjah, after his own son Azrikam, Abisai and Sithri. Amnon told him of Mattan's fearful end, but when he attempted to speak of Jedidjah his eyes filled with tears. This greatly surprised Joram.

Meanwhile the master of the vineyard called Joram, and speaking in Greek, reproached him severely.

"Have I placed thee over the sons of Judah that thou, with tales of home, shouldst make their hearts heavy and their hands weak for their labors?" He spoke harshly to Joram, and said in conclusion: "Thou shalt be accountable to me for thy countrymen, and I will require their work at thy hands." Joram went sorrowfully about his business and Amnon also returned to his task.

The next day when Amnon arose and went to the vineyard, his head was dizzy and all kinds of confused thoughts crowded his brain. The morning was clear with a cloudless sky, but before noon a wind arose from the sea which drove the clouds from the vault of heaven to the ends of the earth, and the entire horizon veiled itself in darkness. Amnon, with a sinking heart, sat on the summit and looked with an anxious gaze at the sun, whose blood-red beams strove to pierce the clouds. He lifted up his voice and said:

"O thou great light which rules the day, thou art a faithful witness of my covenant with Thamar. At this hour she appears to lift me up to thee. She now goes in thy light to the Mount of Olives to gaze upon the beauty of thy rising. O, bring me hope with thy beams, and healing with thy wings! Thou seest her and seest me. Tell me the words which are now falling from her rosy lips. Let me hear her voice, which says to me: 'Hope, Amnon, for hope is life!' O thou health-bringing sun, that dost bring to light all hidden things, all the intrigues of hypocrites, all deceit and every evil deed, shine upon the city of God, and reveal my integrity to Thamar! I am burned with her anger, and God also has turned his face away from me. What does the sunlight avail me? In the sunshine I behold only my misfortune, and all my pain and trouble. Why dost thou still tarry, thou morning star? Hide thy brightness behind the dark clouds that it become night, for my ways are hidden from God. Send thy light no more upon the world, even as Thamar has turned her countenance from me. Let day become dark upon the earth,—let moon and stars vanish, for my light has gone out! One after the other let the lights of heaven fall down from the firmament which they have studded for thousands of years! As the linden leaves fall in the autumn, so shall they all fall to the ground, and revolve in the darkness like the stars of the realm of shadows. Joy and bliss shall vanish from the earth. Friendship shall be turned into enmity, mercy into cruelty, right into wrong, and the whole world shall become a vale of sorrow.

The angry Deity shall blend water and fire, and shall mingle the sea with the dry land. Heaven and earth shall be at war, and the earth shall rise up against all who dwell upon it. Horror shall reign in the heavens and darkness cover the earth, for God, the Lord, shall smite it with terrible tempests, and all souls shall tremble before his wrath. The world is indeed smitten on the head. Where is the head of the world? In Jerusalem! Tremble then, O earth,—quake all ye lands! The walls of Zion totter,—her towers sink in the dust! Behold, how they storm her gates! Listen, how they exult and triumph! The heavens tremble and the lintels totter on the habitation of the ancient, eternal light. Yonder also is darkness, and therefore in Zion is darkness, and the dwellers of the Holy City wander in the night and move about the streets like ghosts. They find their way by the glances of the spears, by the lightnings of the flashing swords, by the gleam of the arrows which fly to and fro on the wings of death. What fearful battle, what dreadful slaughter! Assur and Elam have broken through,—the enemy pours without ceasing into the city. They rend and tear in pieces the dumb sheep. Judah's blood is poured out upon the ground,—it spouts up to the sky and colors the moon with its purple,—Siloam, God's stream, flows with blood! O fearful vision of desolation,—O my ruined fatherland! The enemy has heaped evil upon thee and has spared neither the righteous nor the unrighteous. God's wrath has become a whip in the hands of Assur, and a rod in Sennacherib's right hand, wherewith to punish those who walk in the narrow way and

those who travel the path of wickedness. For the anger of the Almighty does not distinguish between the good and the evil. He will, with the besom of destruction, sweep away the righteous and the wicked."

Joram, who stood a little below, listened to Amnon's words but would not interrupt his bitter meditations.

Amnon's thoughts continually wandered more and more, and he cried out in the delirium of fever: "Woe is me! My mother,—my sister,—where are ye living? Why have I forsaken you? Back, back! Go not to the Vale of Tophet,—yonder is the vale of slaughter,—yonder the blood of the wounded fertilizes the ground! Hasten! Ascend God's Holy Mountain and offer up your lives on God's demolished altar. Hasten, or they will find you! Hasten,—for they overtake you and you will become the prey of the sword! Silence, thou gloomy, warring sea! for a moaning voice falls on my ear,—it is the groaning of the slain on the Mount of Olives. Ah! yonder she sits,—she—my life! O let me hear thy voice, my Thamar, my only one! Woe is me! she is utterly dumb,—no word—no syllable! She must perish before the stranglers. I cry to thee from afar, but thou dost welter in thy blood—and Theman also is there! Sun,—shame upon thee, everlasting shame! Why dost thou send thy beams? What scenes dost thou illuminate? Arise, dear sister; come with me. We will make our bed with the slain and will mingle our blood with that of our beloved. Life has separated us,—death will unite us." Amnon's voice failed,

and he sank panting on the ground. Joram, alarmed, hastened to his relief. "I pity thee, thou lovely youth. Thy mind is confused and thy lips speak of phantoms and apparitions. Come, I will place thee on thy bed, for thy limbs are feeble and thy breath is like fire. O thou lovely and tender plant! Accursed be they who have with a careless hand broken thee from the parent stalk and dragged thee from thy fatherland!" Thereupon he took him in his arms and carried him to an arbor in the vineyard. Amnon opened his eyes, saw that Joram was with him, and entreated:

"Have mercy upon me, O Master; I am so miserable!"

"Be quiet, my beloved," said Joram. "I will nurse and guard thee on thy bed of pain as my own son, and will feed and tend thee in thy sickness."

CHAPTER XXVII

Jerusalem Delivered

Y day and by night Thamar's grief knew no respite, for she mourned for Amnon. One spring morning Sithri entered her apartment, where he found her in tears. He said to her: "Behold, the distress of Zion is fearful. Wailing resounds throughout the borders of Judea; therefore weep over those who abide here, but not over Amnon, who tarries peacefully in a strange land, and does not participate in our distress."

Thamar continued sobbing:

"I shall weep and mourn over my friend, who will never more return to me."

Jedidjah also sought to comfort her:

"Why, my daughter, wilt thou awake the dead and rekindle the love which rests in the grave? Verily he will not return to us, but we shall go to him. Weep over the living who are in imminent peril, but mourn no longer for the dead."

"Why dost thou speak so strangely?" asked Sithri.

"Alas!" Jedidjah replied, "it is so. Yesterday a fugitive arrived from Mt. Saul and related the following: 'I saw the company of nobles

from Jerusalem. Among them I noticed a finely formed youth, with sparkling eyes and raven-black hair. His countenance was more dazzling than snow and his skin was whiter than milk. He also perished by the sword.' This was the man's story, and he must have seen Amnon, for he described him exactly. There could have been no mistake. Therefore, Amnon has died by the sword of the Assyrians. Has not the war already claimed countless sacrifices? Why, my child, dost thou weep on account of a single man? Therefore. forget him who has gone to the grave, for he will never more return."

"Who knows?" asked Sithri. "Perhaps the fugitive may have seen another youth who closely resembled Amnon in face and figure. However, be it as it may, if Amnon be really dead, thy tears will never awake him; if he lives, there is evermore the hope that in the future the day of salvation may dawn and bring him back to thee. Therefore, dry thy tears and forget Amnon in these times of confusion."

"No," answered Thamar; "I can never forget Amnon. I shall think of him, whether the sound of battle resounds in the city or the song of jubilee on the day of victory. Awake or asleep, his image hovers over me. Yet, woe is me! an evil dream affrighted me on my couch, and dreams never deceive. Listen, and I will tell it. Last evening I threw myself with a breaking heart upon my couch. At last I fell into a restless, disturbed slumber. Then in my dream I saw the king with his sword girt about his loins. The remnant of his host, who had remained faithful

to him, stood in the East street, prepared for battle. They surrounded the king. Hezekiah raised his eyes, streaming with tears, towards heaven and prayed: 'O Lord of heaven, look down upon thy servant, the king of Judea, who goes forth with a handful of men to battle with the ruler of Assyria, whose warriors are like the multitudes of the heavenly host. To thee, O Lord, I do commend this city, with its women and children, with its aged, with its widows and orphans. O, take these poor ones under thy protection, as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings! Observe and fulfill the covenant which thou didst make with thy people in ancient time, and do not permit the stem of David to become extinct. O, spread thy wings over Jerusalem!' The eyes of the warriors overflowed with tears at these words of their king, and they cried with choked voices: 'Peace be with thee, thou city of God! Peace be with thee, thou Temple of the Lord!' They then took leave of their wives and children, who had assembled to witness their departure. At one time I saw Amnon in their midst. His eyes shone, and he was arrayed in a coat of mail and girt about with sword and shield. He sat upon his horse, over whose back the lion's skin was spread, and he appeared like a hero going to battle. He beckoned to me and shouted: 'Farewell, Thamar, my only love. God protect thee. Death shall not separate us.' With these words he vanished. I was perplexed, and stood as if rooted to the ground. I sought to speak, but my tongue clave to the roof of my mouth. I strove to cry out, but could make no sound. Not until the

troops had departed was my tongue loosened. Then I lifted up my voice and cried: 'O thou, my heart's beloved,—O thou prince of my youth, whither goest thou, and why wilt thou transgress God's command? Art thou not betrothed unto me, and hath not the Lord, through his servant Moses, said: 'When a man hath betrothed a wife and hath not taken her, let him go and return unto his house, lest he die in the battle and another man take her'? Oh, come back and dwell at ease at my house! I followed the troops and cried continually, Amnon,—Amnon! I wept and screamed, but no one gave ear to me. I came to the Corner Gate, which is also called the Tower Gate, and sought to go out, but the watchman prevented. I saw how the shelters and niches had been prepared in the walls, and how the women of Zion stood on the roofs, weeping and beating their breasts. I also ascended one of the towers, from whence I saw the hosts of the Assyrians spread out before my eyes. I was greatly terrified,—my hair stood on end, and I trembled in every limb when I heard the wild shouts of the foreign warriors. So I stood and gazed, while my mind bore me forward over the squadrons of Judah, who slowly and with great difficulty advanced. The lances and spears rattled like hail upon the field. Darts flew, arrows whizzed through the air on the wings of death. The battle went sore with Judah, and already many heroes lay dead upon the battlefield. Then suddenly a great tumult and mighty shouts of rejoicing arose among the Assyrian hosts because the king of Judah had been captured alive. The

remnant of our host turned their backs upon the enemy and fled in disorder like wandering sheep. They struggled and fell one over the other, while the Assyrian hosts pursued after them like wolves. The voices of their officers, shouting: 'On,—on! ye sons of Elam and Assur,—storm the heights of Zion, break down and crush all to the ground!—on, ye sons of Assur!—slay, burn, destroy with fire and sword whomsoever cometh in your way!' sounded like roaring lions. Then I beheld how Amnon was trodden during the tumult under the hoofs of the enemies' horses. I heard his death-cry. Then I sought to throw myself down from the top of the tower to die with him. I stood up and—awoke. I trembled in every limb and my heart was amazed over the terrible scene. I verily know, my father, I am not alone in this world, and that many others also have seen God's chastening rod fall upon them in these days. Yet it seems to me that God has dealt strangely with me, for since the day when I learned to know Amnon, my joy and my sorrow have exceeded all that I had endured before. Therefore, my father and mother, and ye, my dear friends, cease your endeavors to console me, for I can never forget Amnon. I shall think of him when the roar of the battle ceases in the streets, when the hymns of rejoicing resound in the day of victory. Whether waking or sleeping, his image hovers over me."

"Although this dream of Thamar appears wonderful," said Sithri, thoughtfully, "yet in my eyes it is nothing remarkable, for, like all of us, she also must tremble every moment in this time

of confusion, when the earth trembles under its inhabitants. The intelligence brought by the fugitive from Mt. Saul depressed her mind in regard to Amnon. Therefore, she has beheld in her dreams the events that agitated her mind when awake."

"This is my opinion," said Theman, "for our hearts are filled with constant fear before the superior strength of the cruel besieger, and throughout the entire day we listen to the blast of the battle-trumpets which the Levites have blown ever since the enemy has come into the land. So when a dream comes to us it adds to our distress, because we see depicted therein that which our ears have heard."

"How shall all this end?" asked Hananel.

"There is only one hope for us," said Sithri; "therefore listen to what Ben-Amos in holy zeal has prophesied: 'Thus speaketh the Lord through his holy prophets. God will execute judgment through fire and sword. The breath of his mouth will descend like a stream of fire upon the Assyrians, and storms of flames of fire will be their destiny. No more sword glance shall be seen, and no more clashing of darts shall be heard, for Assur shall tremble before the voice of God, and the enemy shall be destroyed by his rebuke. Sinners shall be afraid and all the hypocrites shall tremble, because eternal fire hath been prepared for them. But the Lord will protect the righteous; they shall dwell securely under the shadow of his wings until the day of wrath is overpast. In the evening Zion shall travail and endure infinite pain and anguish, but in the morning the Lord will

help his city, and then shall be made manifest whom he has loved. But all who remain in Zion shall be called holy.' "

* * *

The mighty hosts of Assyrians lay quietly around the city, like lions around a sheepfold. What could harm them?

The sun, like a ball of fire, sank in the Western Sea and concealed itself from the horrors of the fearful night. The moon rose blood-red above the Mount of Olives. The evening of the Passover began, the Feast which reminds God's people of the heroic deeds accomplished by the Lord on the fields of Zoan, in the land of Egypt. But on this Passover evening rejoicings were silent, for all the inhabitants of Zion trembled before the enemy. Those who yet remained in Jerusalem shut themselves up in their rooms to weep. The priests lamented between the porch and the altar, for the joy of the Feast had been turned into mourning. The king laid aside his crown, cast off his ornaments and clothed himself in sackcloth. Isaiah-Ben-Amos, however, poured out his heart before God in fervent prayer, and pleaded:

"Look upon Zion, our gathering-place. Behold, the streets are desolate and the heights laid waste; the walls of Zion mourn and the servants of thy temple are disheartened. Behold, Zion is full of pain and anguish; trembling and shaking surround her. Instead of the noise of the Feast

and the bustle of the partakers, one hears only the uproar of the besiegers. Instead of the sweet melody of the harp and lute and of those who ascend to thy Temple, the hoarse voices of the heathen resound. Instead of the pouring of thank-offerings upon the altar flow the tears of the oppressed. Awake, O awake! thou Almighty God, thou, our shield and protector. Awake, destroy thine enemy, thou mighty one of Jacob! Step forth in thy majesty. Let us also behold the power of thine arm, which beforetime was so mighty on the fields of Zoan and at the Red Sea."

The Lord is fearful in his anger. He girds his loins with wrath, and strides forth in majesty when he appears as a God of vengeance.

The Omnipotent nods, and all things in heaven and on the earth leave their courses and obey the Lawgiver of the universe. At the whiff of his breath fire unites with ice and streams of water descend upon the earth. When in ancient time he went forth in his chariot, the waters of the sea stood like a wall before him. At his command the waves arose and buried the sons of Ham with their horses and chariots beneath them.

Now again, as of old, the Lord, on this awful night, went forth in his chariot with a burning wind and consuming fire. Flaming angels descended and swept over the Assyrian host. They swept like a whirlwind through it, and their wings fanned the burning wind until it blasted like red-hot fire. They passed, and nothing remained save unearthly stillness and the slumber of death!

The anger of the Lord continued but a moment, yet the Assyrian hosts had been destroyed by the fiery vapor.

When morning broke, the secret of the Lord, which until then had been concealed by the darkness, was revealed. Day and night strove with each other, and knew not which should proclaim God's judgment. The watchers on the towers listened. About the Assyrian camp, behold, all was still—no voice was heard! Then those who watched over God's city lifted up their voices and sang on the heights of Zion:

"Awake, Jerusalem! Behold, the Lord hath gone forth while thou wert slumbering and hath destroyed thine enemies. Arise with song and rejoicing, for thy besiegers are confounded. The right hand of the Lord is exalted; the right hand of the Lord hath gotten us the victory, as in the days when he brought us up out of the land of Egypt. The Lord thy God hath subdued the fury of the strangers. He rolled night over them, and they were crushed like miserable worms. Arise, Daughter of Zion!—clothe thyself in thy might, for thine enemies are covered with shame and thy besiegers are no more! Awake Judah, and celebrate the Passover Feast."

The terrors of the night were over. The sun arose in splendor and its beams brought victory and safety to the inhabitants of David's City. The sick left their beds of pain; the hungry went forth from their miserable huts; the cripples threw aside their crutches and leaped like the roes; the weak and feeble girded themselves about with strength. All the people flocked to the Assyrian

camp. Behold, the valleys, which the day before had been filled with battle-chariots and armed warriors, lay full of corpses, and the children of Israel secured much spoil.

The city, which had been in deep distress and confusion, was now filled with mirth and rejoicing because the Lord had turned Jerusalem into a joyful city. All rejoiced and exulted over the Lord's wonderful triumph and hastened to the Feast. Praise and thanksgiving resounded on God's Holy Hill; sadness vanished, care and distress were forgotten.

Thamar ascended to the Mount of God, together with Naomi and Penina. There she prayed:

"O God, thou workest such wonders, cause my dead one to arise that he may rejoice with his people."

Naomi and Penina likewise prayed:

"Comfort us also, thou God of grace, as thou hast dispensed comfort to Zion and restored the ruins of thy Holy City."

"Behold," said Thirza, "the siege of Zion has been raised through God's grace, for the Lord is almighty. Therefore we will hope in him and trust that he will return Amnon to us again."

* * *

Hezekiah collected together before the city gates the remnant of the prisoners from Egypt and the captives from Cush whom the Assyrian king had carried away, and thus addressed them:

"Behold, the God of Israel has removed the

yoke of the Assyrians from your necks and has burst the fetters with which you were bound. He has burned Assur like a wick in the fire of his anger, for he is jealous for Zion. But why should I relate God's deeds? The heavens declare the glory of God and the earth praises him, for the destroyer of our lands has been disappointed, and he who laid waste the fields hath vanished. Why should I tell you of God's acts, which you heard with your ears and saw with your eyes? Yet your descendants at some future time will listen to the narration of the deeds which you have seen to-day. Look now, ye fugitives from all nations, and be astonished! Behold, the corpses of the Assyrians and the fallen of Elam are as offal on the soil of Judea! What has become of thee, Assur, who controlled the destinies of all lands and nations? Thou didst come into the land by night like a robber, but thou wast uncovered like a thief when the Sun of Righteousness appeared. Thou didst bruise all nations as in a mortar; thou didst break in pieces the idols of the heathen round about. The gods of Hamath and Arphad, of Carchemish and Calneh, thou didst throw to the ground, and the power of their kings thou hast brought to naught. But when thou didst lift up thy hand against the Daughter of Zion it became leprous, and thou couldst not heal it. But ye, the heroes of his hosts, ye who were nobles and princes in your nations and kings and rulers in your lands, ye have flown from a far country like eagles to the House of the Lord. Ye knew neither sleep nor rest, but now ye have become faint and rest in everlasting slumber on

the soil of Judea! Behold these things, ye captives from the nations,—return to your homes and proclaim to all the heathen, unto the most distant isles, the might of the God of Jacob."

The company of the captives, with one voice, answered:

"With thee only is God, and in Jerusalem alone is his great name. To the Eternal be honor and praise. Salvation to his holy place and salvation to all the righteous!"

This remnant departed from thence, and published the wonders of God to the ends of the earth, and praised his power and glory in the distant isles. Lo, songs of praise arose from the ends of the earth, and those who dwelt afar off exalted the God of Zion. Many nations sought to propitiate the Lord through gifts. They also sent Hezekiah valuable presents and costly spices. From beyond the waters of Cush, the kings sent ambassadors in vessels to the people whom the Lord had so signally delivered. The city of Tyre also worshipped the living God and sent back the Israelites who were fugitives there. But every one who called himself an Israelite gladly acknowledged the God of Jacob, and said: "I also belong to Zion."

Among the ambassadors who brought gifts to the Lord from Tyre and Sidon was Adoram. He desired to visit Amnon and to learn of his welfare, for on his journey to Assyria he had greatly enjoyed his company. But he found only Thamar, who was mourning on account of her absent friend. Adoram was greatly astonished over the relation of the recent events.

Hananel said to him:

"I will give all my wealth to the man who will bring Amnon back to me."

"I have traveled over the sea," interposed Adoram. "There I met numerous ships, which rocked as lightly on the waves as the eagles soar in the air. These all carried to their homes the distressed of Israel and the exiles from Judea. Neither storm nor east winds hindered their progress, but a soft, gentle breeze filled their sails, and the exiles sailed over a peaceful sea in pleasant, cheerful ships back to Jerusalem. I shall now return to my own home, for I have a mind to put to sea again to visit the Ionian isles and travel to Tarshish. I would not be so anxious about the matter if I did not consider every Jewish man more precious than gold, and I shall seek after all the scattered of Israel, wherever I can find them, as for hidden treasure. If God shall permit me to find Amnon, I will bring him hither as a gift which I will not exchange for silver or gold, for his soul is very dear to me."

Thamar dried her tears and spoke words of hope.

"Therefore, may thy soul find favor with God, so that thou mayest bring Amnon back from the place where he sojourns, as thou didst once bring him back from Nineveh. This will also be a joy to thee, when thou shalt see how many will gather around thee and praise thy name on account of thy good deeds. My blessing will also rest upon thee so long as thou dost live."

"I will do all in my power," said Adoram, "but do thou pray unto God to prosper my way, while he in these days showers peace and blessing upon the inhabitants of Zion."

Jedidjah's household then blessed Adoram, and presented him with gifts and tokens of honor, after which he started on his journey.

CHAPTER XXVIII

The Song of the Fugitive

INCE the power of Sennacherib had been broken and the hosts which had encamped around Jerusalem had been annihilated, two months had elapsed.

Thamar's hopes decreased every day, while her grief for Amnon continually increased. Theman perceived that Penina constantly avoided him, and he found no encouragement to renew his suit, so he went to abide with Sithri.

Thamar took up her abode in the summer-house, and Jedidjah gave her a discreet maid, Puah, to serve her. Puah often reasoned with her mistress, and urged her to be comforted concerning the absent Amnon, and to bestow her affection upon some other youth who might prove agreeable to her.

"I pray thee, Puah, refrain from thy vain attempts at consolation," was Thamar's invariable response. "Lo, my friend said to me: 'Thou art my only one!' Since that time he has been the only one on the earth to me, and there is no other. Thou dost labor in vain to comfort me; thy words are as oil on the fire of my love."

Summer had passed away, yet Thamar's grief knew no cessation. Autumn had again re-

turned, but Thamar was still depressed. She sadly retraced the steps she had taken with Amnon, and the remembrance of the pleasure they had taken together only deepened the wounds in her heart. She often beheld Amnon in the visions of the night, but the awakening only increased her remorse. Many times when sleep had departed from her eyelids she fancied she heard his voice calling her from the olive-trees. Then she would spring from her couch, awake Puah, and exclaim: "Behold, my ear perceived the voice of my beloved!" Puah would listen, but could detect no sound. So it came to pass that Puah ceased to pay any attention to her fancies.

On the fifteenth day of September, Thamar accidentally found the letter which Amnon had written to her on his flight from Bethlehem, and which Jedidjah had concealed.

She went out to the olive-tree and there read its contents. It was filled with heart-felt laments and tender parting words, like the farewell message of a dying person, and ended with this song:

The field of Bethlehem,—there did I dwell,
There the fierce lion before my prowess fell;
O memories of youth and happy hours!
Like a new vine love grew within my breast,
And there my spirit fled and found no rest.
Alas, this love me ever overpowers!

Love have I known and sorrow deep.
The city of joy, alas, I fain would keep!
O Thamar! with the cord of love, to thee

Thou didst me draw. The grace of thy fresh youth
Thou gavest me, and plightedst me thy troth;
And with thine eyes, like dove's, didst ravish me.

My love for thee, O Thamar, made me blind;
My foolish heart to vanity inclined,
Built castles in the air that proudly rose,
And found in thee a more than princely dower.
My hope, alas, is like a withered flower,
And my desire like water when it flows.

Though young, I still vicissitudes have known:
False enemies have discord 'tween us sown;
And so, alas, I must endure thy scorn!
My spirit trembles, seized with shuddering dire,
For thou hast made the eve of my desire
A night of horror, and without a morn.

I am become a hissing and reproach,
And by-word, unto all whom I approach.
What have I done? Did I my God despise?
I've loved thee, Thamar;—this is all my blame.
Alas, my agony and bitter shame,
For loathsome I've become in Thamar's eyes!

My heart-strings have been snapped by wicked hands,
Consumed, without my fault, like flaxen bands;
And with them, too, my youthful hopes and fears
Have perished. Love, with her delights, her grace,
And every sweetness, mocks me in the face.
O death, spare those who are of tender years.

Heaven's pillars seem to melt and disappear,
The stars of God withdraw their glorious cheer.
Bent with this sorrow, whither take my way?
Alas, I go alone with all this load!
What shall befall me? Death, for want of food,
By adder's sting, or as a leopard's prey?

Snares set for me on every hand I find;
Before me mischief, and the grave behind!
Where shall I go? what place can rest afford?
The very earth beneath my feet doth quake,
A net is spread before each step I take;—
The lying tongue, hyenas, and the sword!

A desert land alone can give me rest;—
Sole refuge this for all who are oppressed.
My grave shall be my wedding chamber, where
The wicked cease from troubling; and the dead
The sword of Ashur do no longer dread.
The earth shall be my shield and breast-plate there.

After Thamar had read the letter, she raised her arms to heaven and cried:

"Let this be enough, O Lord! Shall I alone endure misery and sorrow in this thy city of joy? Thou hast taken away the soul of Amnon, so take my soul also from me, that there be no longer any sighing or lamenting in Zion. Lo, on this sheet Amnon has poured out all his suffering and his dying groans. It crushes my heart like a fearful thunderbolt. How glorious, O Zion, didst thou appear to me when Amnon's beloved figure traversed thy streets! yet what art thou now to me? The Valley of Baca! I cry like the ostrich, and turn every joyful one into a mourner. Yet I shall not live long, and my love to Amnon will not cease until the end of my days, and also at my death I will embalm it in my heart to rest with me in the dust. O, if I could only breathe out my soul where the earth opened its mouth to receive his blood!"

While Thamar was thus uttering her plaints, Jedidjah entered the room.

"For one month is an honorable widow required to mourn for her husband," he said, "but thou hast mourned over a lost bridegroom for a year and a day. Thou dost refuse to be comforted and dost embitter thy parents' lives with thy sorrow."

"My father, why didst thou conceal Amnon's letter from me?" answered Thamar. "If I had read it before, my career would certainly have been ended, and I should no longer burden thee with my sorrow."

Jedidjah affectionately replied:

"Was not Joseph counted among the dead by Jacob, yet after many days he became a fountain of life for his father's whole household? Therefore, my child, continue to hope in God, for with him nothing is impossible."

"Woe is me!" answered Thamar. "What power have I to preserve? And to what end should I be patient? Shall I ever see him again? O, my father, press no more comforting words upon me, for every consolation is wasted upon me. I will weep and mourn from the bottom of my heart, and this shall be my consolation."

CHAPTER XXIX

The Conversion of Adoram

BY custom, Jedidjah every year prepared a feast in the summer-house for his friends. This was always held on the thirteenth day of September. Afterward he closed this house, which was not to be reopened until the return of spring. He kept the Feast of Tabernacles by dwelling for seven days in a booth, and then returned to his house in the city for the winter.

Although there had been in this year neither seed-time nor harvest, and Judea had been forced to eat what grew of itself on account of the war, still Jedidjah did not depart from his custom, but prepared a sumptuous repast for his friends. He said to Thirza, his wife:

"Behold, how joy reigns in this city! Even the dwellers in distant cities flock hither to keep the Feast of Tabernacles in this our gathering-place and to rejoice over the prosperity of the whole country. In our home alone is rejoicing wanting. Therefore let us invite the handsomest youths, the pride of Zion, and the loveliest maidens, the desire of Judea. Let us also summon musicians. Perchance one of the young men may find favor in Thamar's eyes, and she will forget Amnon."

"Thou dost speak like all men," said Thirza, shaking her head in disapproval. "Yet believe me, my beloved, we women act and think differently. Ye lift up your eyes upon many women, and they please you, and you bestow your love upon them. We, however, choose one man from all the others, and if we lose this one, with our whole heart and to all eternity we never forget him. Yet proceed to make this experiment. Then thou wilt see if my words are true."

On the thirteenth day of September, at noontime, Sithri and Theman came from Carmel, and Abisai from Bethlehem, to Jedidjah's house. Noble youths and charming maidens also appeared at the repast. Naomi and Penina came, too. All kinds of musical instruments resounded, —harps and lutes, timbrels and shawms, flutes and cymbals. But pleasure was mingled with grief and rejoicing with sighing, for whenever Theman and Penina exchanged glances, both became sad and silent. Thamar had appeared at the feast, but when she heard the sound of harps, her heart grew heavy and she wept. The matrons, who had come with their daughters from the surrounding towns, sought to console her, but she would not be comforted.

Theman and Penina vainly strove to restrain their tears, while Naomi and Thirza gave way to their sorrow. Jedidjah's guests tarried in the summer-house until late at night. They narrated the dangers and hardships of the war, which were still fresh in their minds; they told of the individual suffering which they had endured at the hands of the Assyrians; they praised God for

his grace and for the wonderful deliverance he had vouchsafed his people. Then, when they perceived that the happiness of Jedidjah's house was still saddened, they took their leave.

Thirza assigned Naomi and Penina apartments adjoining each other. Sithri, Abisai, Jedidjah, Hananel and Theman also remained, because they wished to rise early in the morning to cut palm branches and willows with which to erect booths.

Puah, Thamar's maid, who had taken too much wine, said to Thamar:

"Lo! thy sorrow is no greater than that of Penina and Theman. Why shouldest thou mourn more than they? Naomi is Amnon's mother, yet she controls herself."

"Verily, Naomi has two children, therefore she can rejoice over one if the other is dead, but I loved only one, and that one is lost. Penina may rejoice, for her beloved has returned from Carmel and she can look upon him. Where is my wanderer, over whom I might rejoice? Behold, the gates of Zion stand open day and night, and Judea's wanderers return from far beyond the river Cush, from the North and the South. But for my chosen one, my friend, the earth has closed her bolts and bars, for whoever once finds rest under her covering she never more releases. Every heart rejoices, every soul overflows with gladness, while I mourn for my friend who is absent." Thus spoke Thamar in the bitterness of her heart. When all the household of her father was wrapped in peaceful slumber, she wept and mourned until the morning-watch.

The children of Zion, who feared God and kept his commandments, rose up with the morning-star and dispersed, some here, some there, under the myrtles, over the meadows, by the brookside, to gather palms, willows and all kinds of green branches for the booths in which they wished to rejoice on the first day of the Feast.

The stars paled gradually before the glow of the rosy dawn, then the whole heaven overflowed with a flood of light which the sun sent forth before it left its tent. The pools lay tranquil within their green banks, and the reflection of the day-spring made them look like sheets of beaten silver, or like mirrors in costly frames. The last stars shone like silver points upon the deep blue veil of the departing night. The whole spectacle of this charming, fresh morning incited every creature to gladness and to songs of cheerful praise. The eagle awoke his brood, all the birds lifted up their voices in song, and all creatures on the earth, as well as those who live in the air, on the hills and in the valleys, praised God, who is the tower and stronghold of his people.

Theman and Sithri had gone out to cut palm branches, but Thamar, worn out with unrest, had not arisen, for only light sleep had visited her eyelids. Even this had not been refreshing, for, while apparently sleeping, her mind was awake and her ears caught every sound. Gradually troubled dreams came, in which truth and falsehood more strangely intermingled, and the sounds which reached her half-opened ears united with the images which her imagination pictured. As

she lay thus restless and despondent, lo, she heard a clarion voice, which came from the direction of the olive-trees, uttering these words:

"How beautiful are the heights of the Holy Hill! How lovely the green olive-branches! A delightful radiance of venerable repose is outspread over them. Their summits rise proudly in the blue morning air, and these branches distil the dew of heaven. They wave like the wings of the cherubim, which bend over the heads of the righteous and rustle over Ben-Amos, whose ear the Lord has opened that he hearkens to his word every morning. How charming are thy tabernacles, O Zion! Peace be within thy walls and prosperity within thy palaces! For a short time did the thunder crush thee and the streams of Belial overflow thee, but these horrors are overpast. Now all thy fetters are broken and thou dost bloom like a rose. Bloom yet higher, thou fragrant flower! Thy children rest peacefully upon their couches and God's name is exalted. Here, a father relates to his son the justice and mercy of the Lord and his wonderful doings, and they rejoice together over the power of the Almighty and his timely succor. Yonder, a mother clasps her babe in her arms with a sense of rest and security, while her heart swells with thankfulness to God, who has protected them. The bridegroom rejoices with his bride because the times of need and distress in Zion are ended. They sing and are merry, and no one disturbs their happiness. The early risers stream up to the House of God to sing and praise the Lord with the morning star. O unspeakable bliss! I

hear again the songs which there resound to the honor of the Eternal. They resound like the voice of God,—the voice of the Lord which shall be heard to the ends of the earth. Let all flesh be silent. Cease, all ye feathered songsters,—listen to the hymn of the Temple! For the voices of the Levites are now heard praising God in the Temple":

Oh, Zion, praise the Lord of Hosts,
Whose throne is set on high,
Who spreads the day-spring round thy feet,
And lights o'erhead the sky,
To cheer thee mid thy darkest woes,
While gloom envelops all thy foes.
Thy God, who rules and never sleeps,
Awaits to bless each one who weeps!

He drops the dew upon the grass
Throughout the silent night,
And tints the mountain-tops with joy
At primal gleam of light,
While songs of love the valleys greet
As worshipers at Shiloh meet
To praise him for the favor shown
To all who worship at His throne.

Sing, sing, oh, sing unto the Lord,
Ye mountain-tops and stars;
Sing, sing, oh, sing, brave Zion's sons
For victory crowns your scars;
Sing, sing, ye daughters of our race,
Glad songs of praise with ancient grace,
For all the cruel foemen fly
Before our King who rules on high.

Thamar arose and cried out:

"Awake, Puah, for I heard a gentle voice like that of my friend, which uttered sweet words, and then all was silent."

Puah, who was sleeping soundly from the wine, was not easily roused, and begged to be left alone, saying:

"Let me rest, for I am weary. Thou hast certainly been dreaming."

Thamar sighed.

"It might easily be that I dreamed," she replied, "for my thoughts are continually with him."

Then she heard the voice again and caught the words:

"O, they are the harps of heaven, the songs of Jehovah, wherein body and soul unite! Peace, like a holy radiance, overshadows God's city, and the wanderers are flocking home like doves to their cotes. Every bride adorns her bridegroom, but where is she who should crown me with a wreath! Where is my only beloved? O, she was long since allotted to another, while to me was given sorrow and a broken heart! O, Zion, Zion, the heavens are my witness that in thee I drained the cup of misery to the dregs! Why can I not taste the cup of salvation in thy Holy Hill? I was driven forth from thy gates as the child of a stranger and as the son of an evil-doer. Tidings of thy distress reached me in distant isles. Now also receive me within thy walls, for my heart, which was filled with shame and bitterness, has longed after thee alone. Here is the olive-tree on whose bark Thamar's name and mine are engraved. It is still green and vigorous, and the

dew of heaven drips from its branches, while the dew of my youth is dried up, and I, like a withered leaf, am tossed to and fro by every wind. There yet stands, like the shadow of my former happiness, the bridal tent erected for me. Azrikam now enjoys it with Thamar. O, I cannot survive my sorrow! My soul sinks within me. This olive-tree shall be my monument."

Amnon could say no more. He was overcome by emotion. Thamar, who had been eagerly drinking in all his words, exclaimed:

"No, no! I surely am not dreaming, for I feel the tears running down my cheeks and my heart beats as if it would break."

She arose, dressed herself quickly, and sought with trembling hands to open the door, but the key was not in the lock. She shook Puah to arouse her.

"Wake up, Puah," she cried. "Arise, give me the key, else when I go to seek my friend he will not be there. Hasten, for I am dying of impatience."

Puah arose, rubbing her eyes. "Pardon me, my mistress," she said, "but thou dost indulge in wild fancies which lead astray all who dwell in thy father's house. What aileth thee that thou dost grant me no rest?"

"Oh, foolish one!" cried Thamar. "Give me the key quickly, for the walls seem to close about me!"

Puah took the key from beneath her pillow and handed it to her mistress, who hastily unlocked the door and went hurriedly round the

house, looking carefully on all sides, but her friend was nowhere to be seen. Then she went on farther, crying:

"Amnon! Amnon!"

Hearing no answer, she asked herself:

"Could I really have dreamed while awake?"

But now, lo! Adoram stood before her and said:

"Go onward farther among the olive-trees. Yonder thou wilt find him whom thou seekest and wilt behold that which thou hast not expected. But keep silence with every one in thy father's house, for I am he who hath ransomed him, and I must be the one that bringeth the good tidings."

Thamar ran like a swift-footed gazelle to the spot which Adoram had designated, while he went on his way to Jedidjah's house.

"Amnon!" cried Thamar, "thou, my light and salvation! Thou art in the land of the living!" and threw herself upon her beloved's neck.

"Art thou truly my Thamar, my little dove, my faithful one?" was Amnon's greeting.

Neither could say more. Joy had made them speechless. They stood like two statues carved in stone, wrapped in a silent embrace.

Finally, Thamar opened her lips and said: "Truly, the heavens declare thy righteousness and the earth testifies to thy faithfulness, but all the shame belongs to me. I was like a misled dove, and so entangled in self-conceit that I gave

faith to those who slandered thee. Only for a little time did I err regarding thee, but for many long days have I washed away my sins in a flood of tears. All these sins have I committed against Amnon, the shepherd, but the son of Joram, the nobleman, will forgive me."

"Abandon me!" entreated Amnon, who could not comprehend her last words; "abandon Amnon, the poor shepherd! Thou prince's daughter, go from hence to Azrikam, who rejoices in thy love. Thou hast erred—but only go. Joram's son will forgive thee. Turn thy face from me. Why should I give up the ghost before thine eyes?"

"Oh, not yet, thou Prince of Judea, thou lord of my youth!" cried Thamar. "Breathe not out thy life which is so closely united with mine. Only live for Thamar, for thy beloved, who can no longer live without thee. Behold, Azrikam gathered unlawful wealth and devoured the inheritance of Joram, thy father, yet finally he was despised as Nabal, the son of Achan, the reprobate. Death has already overtaken them both; while Zimri, Chepher and Bukjah, with all their associates, have licked the dust. Therefore, Amnon, thou son of Joram, enjoy thy young life with me."

He stood motionless, utterly confounded. Jedidjah, Thirza, Hananel, Naomi, Penina, together with Theman, Sithri and Abisai, now hastened hither and embraced him, shedding meanwhile joyous tears.

Naomi cried, "O, thou child of my heart!"

"O, our brother!" exclaimed Theman and Penina.

"Here is the delight of our hearts," said Thirza and Jedidjah. "This is the son of our beloved Joram. God has also brought him back to heal all wounds, to break all fetters, to dry all tears."

"So, then," cried Hananel, joyfully, "my redeemer and my heir has returned! Now I shall die in peace, for my dream is fulfilled,—not a tittle thereof has failed."

"Yes, thy dream is fulfilled," answered Amnon, who knew not what had taken place, "but I am still like one in a dream, and know not whether my eyes deceive me or an evil spirit mocks me."

"Open thine eyes, thou son of Joram," said Sithri. "Behold, thou art surrounded by those who love thee. Awake, and behold thy beloved Thamar standing before thee! Thou mayest now rejoice in her love. She is now thine in body and soul, and no longer an idle vision. Thine enemies have died in shame and disgrace. They have become an abomination to all men. Arise from thy low estate and carry thy head high, for thou art loved and honored by all people."

When Sithri had ended his words, Adoram came from among the olive-trees with Joram. The latter had not yet learned that Amnon was his son. Adoram had kept it hidden from him, that, with mutual surprise, their joy might be increased.

Joram perceiving Jedidjah, ran to him, threw his arms about his neck, wept and cried:

"O, Jedidjah, my faithful companion, my beloved friend!"

Jedidjah did not recognize him.

"Who art thou who callest my name?" he inquired. Amnon stood near, silent, astonished and downhearted.

Joram took the seal-ring from his right hand, saying:

"Remember the words which you spake to me long years ago! 'All the jewels in the world cannot compensate for true love, yet a token of remembrance is valued by every friend.' Behold, this ring has not been removed from thy friend Joram's hand for twenty years. I fell into the hands of the Philistines and was enslaved by the Ionians, who robbed me of all my jewels. But this ring remained to me as my last treasure, and when I looked upon it I forgot my poverty, my misery and my imprisonment, and my heart dwelt on thee and all my dear ones at home. Tell me, my friend, does there yet remain a branch of my root, or do I stand here alone, a leafless stem?"

"What do my eyes behold?" said Thamar, with a trembling voice. "Has God said to the earth, 'Cast forth thy dead'? and to hell, 'Give up thy phantoms'?" Here her emotion checked her utterance.

"God has prepared a day of rejoicing for us," exclaimed Jedidjah. "The Lord has done great things for us. How shall we thank him for all his mercies? Behold, my friend, thy wife stands before thee, with Amnon and Penina, who shall

be thy consolation to compensate thee for thy years of misfortune. Verily, our love for each other was very great, but it has manifested itself far more greatly in our children, and I knew it not." Jedidjah then related to him the events which had taken place in Joram's long absence.

Joram embraced Naomi.

"O thou, my faithful wife," he said, "twenty long years have I been anxious about thee and my heart has longed for thee. Now my sighing is turned into unspeakable joy. O, this happiness is almost too great! May God strengthen my heart to endure it!"

"O thou lord of my youth!" Naomi exclaimed. "For thy sake God has sustained me and given me strength to bear grief and shame. Verily the years of our youth are passed away like clouds and mists, but in our middle age God has opened before us a new world and a beautiful life."

Afterwards she took Amnon and Penina by the hand, led them to Joram, and said:

"My dear husband, embrace our dear children. To them also God has allotted much grief and suffering."

Joram folded Amnon in his arms, and kissed him, saying:

"Thou art also my son, thou lovely youth, who hadst already won my heart on the island of Cyprus. I nursed thee on thy sick-bed, and my heart clung to thee without my knowing thy relation to me."

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"O my father," replied Amnon, "thou who dost appoint me to honor and dost uplift my head, I also loved thee when I knew thee not."

"What is my daughter called?" asked Joram.

"Penina is my name," she replied.

"Truly, thy name is well chosen," continued Joram, "for thou art a pearl. O God, how infinitely great is thy mercy! If I had found only one remaining of my whole house, I should have said, 'It is enough.' What shall I say now, when I find what I never expected? My inheritance in Bethlehem I present to Abisai on account of the friendship he has shown my son Amnon; my property in Carmel I give to Zithri as a recompense for the kindness he showed to Naomi, my wife, who is dearer to me than the apple of my eye, and to Penina, most precious of jewels. But for thee, Adoram, wherewith shall I reward thee for thy deeds? My whole possessions are insufficient to repay thee. Thou hast turned the heart of the fathers to their children and the heart of the bridegroom to the bride."

Adoram answered:

"They who were separated I have brought together, but I, though a Gentile, would draw near to God, whose glory is revealed in these days to all the dwellers upon earth. He has made war to cease in all lands and has given peace to all people. Therefore, I will associate myself with thee, for the God of Zion is greater than all the gods of the other nations. To him be honor, praise and glory! Come! let us go up to the Holy Hill to present thank-offerings and to praise the Lord."

"Adoram," said Joram in a voice of authority, "thou shalt belong to us and to the God of Jacob, who is precious to his people. May He be gracious to thee also, and incorporate thee into the house of Israel!"

Adoram repaired with all the kinsmen of the houses of Jedidjah and Joram to the Temple, where they offered sacrifices and thanked God for his grace and for the wonderful things he had wrought for them. Afterwards they returned to the summer-house, ate, drank and were merry.

"Behold," said Jedidjah to Joram, "the words which I spake to thee twenty years ago have been fulfilled. Did I not say unto thee, when thou didst go to war: 'If God be gracious unto us in the future and return thee in safety, we will sacrifice the thank-offerings and rejoice here in this summer-house with all our families and all our households?' "

Hananel, when he saw Amnon and Thamar folded in a tender embrace, cried:

"My eyes behold the fulfillment of my dream. All the seals are broken and all the mysteries revealed."

"Now I have enough," exclaimed Theman, as he kissed Penina. "God has returned to me that which he took from me. Now the sapphire has been placed in the ring for all eternity."

"Was I not right, Theman," asked Uz, "when I once said to thee, 'Hope smiles from heaven upon the courageous and deliverance springs up from the earth for the resolute. The heat of summer will not dry up the tears of the

innocent, for they are bottled up by Him who dwells above, and he will provide help and deliverance in his own good time.' "

"These are almost my very words," said Thamar—'Hope, Amnon, for hope is life.' "

Amnon embraced her, saying:

"Beloved of my heart, I have hoped according to thy words, and thy love is dearer to me than life."

The End.

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